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Musical Aesthetics and Creative Identification in Two Harmonielehren by John Adams and Arnold Schoenberg

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by

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APPROVAL OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE

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Abstract

Musical Aesthetics and Creative Identification in Two *Harmonielehren* by John Adams and Arnold Schoenberg

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Scott M. Strovas

Claremont Graduate University: 2012

The music of John Adams (b. 1947) exemplifies a reinvestment in traditional instrumental genres and musical values that began to take place in contemporary music in the late 1970s and early ’80s. His *Harmonielehre* for orchestra (1984-85) meets many of the conditions of the symphonic genre, including its scoring for full orchestral forces, its multi-movement structure, its presentation of contrary, dialectical melodic gestures, and its dramatic thematic and harmonic conflict. It is thus ironic that Adams would title his composition after a treatise written by Arnold Schoenberg, a figure whose break from the musical past inspired many of the complex and experimental musical models that arose between the publication of his own *Harmonielehre* (1911, rev. 1922) and that of Adams. But to conclude that Adams’ composition is a statement about tonality is perhaps over-simplistic. Examination of the two works reveals more similarities between the composers’ artistic philosophies than differences. This dissertation is an attempt to expose these similarities in order to discover the motivations behind Adams’ curious decision to title his composition after Schoenberg’s treatise, and to gain a deeper understanding of the artistic priorities shared by both composers that arises from the interrelationship between their respective *Harmonielehren*.

Adams’ title is partly a marker of the types of Romantic-era stylizations that pervade his score. But I argue that the relationship between the two *Harmonielehren* is not merely cursory. Prevalent themes within Schoenberg’s prose can inform the analysis and interpretation of
Adams’ composition. Adams draws on Schoenberg’s treatise as a signifier of his creative identification, one that both complements and departs from the creative model presented in Schoenberg’s text. Both *Harmonielehren* confront the aesthetic expectations of their individual times and places, but while Schoenberg centers his creative identification in a discourse of restless inquiry into new materials and models of musical expression, Adams seemingly subscribes to Schoenberg’s presentation of composition as craft, as the working-with and fitting-together-of the pre-existing sound vocabularies of music.
Acknowledgements

Had it not been for as encouraging and judicious an advisor as Dr. Nancy van Deusen, this dissertation would have taken an entirely different path. I am indebted to her for her guidance, support, and patience throughout the process of this project, and for her commitment at Claremont Graduate University to challenging her students to inquire beyond the established curricula. I have found in Professor van Deusen not only a mentor and friend, but also a model for the type of musicological scholar that I will seek to be throughout my career.

I extend my sincere gratitude likewise to Peter Boyer, Robert Zappulla, and Wendy Martin for their time and energy as reviewers of this dissertation, and for their thoughtful remarks and guidance in bringing the project to a close. Additionally, I owe the generative idea for my dissertation to Professor Boyer, who put together at Claremont Graduate University likely one of the first college courses to take the music of John Adams solely as its object of study, and to my colleagues with whom I shared in the experience of the course: Joel Davis, Glenn Pickett, Phil Ruiz, and Joseph Schubert. I am consistently humbled by the profound musical intellect, yet genuine humility exhibited by each of these individuals. And I am forever grateful for the friendships that we cultivated in the classroom, in study and listening sessions, and, of course, at the local pub.

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Finally, to my wife, my partner in life, my teammate in scholarship, and my best friend, Karen Beth Strovas: I can say with all certainty that this project could not have been completed without your companionship, your attentive ear and critical feedback, your love, your support, and your biscuits. I am captivated by your wit and beauty, and by your generosity and true selflessness. You are good police, KB, and my degree is so much more meaningful because I did it with you.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Harmonielehren of Adams and Schoenberg

“My decision to name my symphony Harmonielehre is almost impossible to explain,” writes John Adams (b. 1947) in his 2008 memoirs, Hallelujah Junction: Composing an American Life.¹ Dotted with as many literary, cultural, political, jazz, rock, and musical-historical references as it is with autobiographical recollections, Hallelujah Junction is intended primarily for an audience of popular, sophisticated taste, and it is a testament to Adams’ success in negotiating the boundaries between artistic rigor and commercial appeal. Adams has become one of the most popular “classical” composers of his generation, a position that attracts as many criticisms as it does laudatory remarks. But if, as Joseph Kerman reasoned in the early 1980s, even the most objective academic dialogue tacitly assumes a certain artistic value in its subject, in its selection of pieces worthy of analysis,² then we find in the many dissertations and scholarly articles concerning Adams’ music a certain validation of his artistic aptitude despite his relative popular appeal.

Hallelujah Junction is also an expression of a well-read and articulate artistic persona whose willingness to center his creative activity within the ideas and materials of culture is almost pervasive. Operas featuring atomic explosions, singing terrorists, and narcissistic politicians, if tinged with a bit of notoriety, certainly count among his major successes. And his instrumental works, while not always explicitly programmatic, nevertheless often reference some broader cultural narrative, be it environmental activism, the dark and sensationalized settings of American film noir, the literary world of Jack Kerouac, or protagonists of music history such as

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Charles Ives and Arnold Schoenberg. Adams’ rarely ordinary titles—*Shaker Loops*, *Slonimsky’s Earbox, Naïve and Sentimental Music, The Dharma at Big Sur*, to name a few—are signifiers of a range of texts, images, and narratives potentially loaded with broader cultural-philosophical implications.

*Harmonielehre* for orchestra (1984-85) is the first of Adams’ instrumental works to make specific reference to a pre-existing text. Titled after Arnold Schoenberg’s extensive treatise on harmony, the *Harmonielehre* of 1911, the composition radiates with musical-historical overtones. Schoenberg’s controversial place in the narrative of Western music history is as well-known as it is misunderstood. He is for all purposes the founder of atonality, a term he abhorred. And his is the creator of a system of composing with twelve tones that, in the decades following the Second World War, would drive music to unprecedented levels of organizational complexity and challenge the limits of aural coherence. In short, Schoenberg is generally perceived as the figure most responsible, Adams notes, for much of the “argumentative and antagonistic” music composed in the twentieth century. Yet, whatever his actual role in the so-called eclipse of a musical “Golden Age,” Schoenberg remained invested in the future of music, and not just as a composer. He was by many accounts a thoughtful and engaging teacher who did not impose his own compositional ideologies onto his students. He taught music as a liberal discipline capable of cultivating the whole person, a view that is discernible in, and which complicates, his first pedagogical work, the *Harmonielehre*.

More than “harmony instruction,” Schoenberg’s treatise is an imaginative meditation on the purpose of musical education and on the relationship between music and nature. It is also a pointed statement about the authority of the composer over his materials and about the objectives

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and role of the composer in society. *Harmonielehre* reflects the paradox that Schoenberg would author a treatise on tonal practice at the same time that he was leaving it behind in his own compositions. Having recently ventured into the expressionistic audioscape of “atonality” in works such as the *Drei Klavierstücke*, Op. 11 and the monodrama *Erwartung* (both 1909), Schoenberg weaves an extensive *apologia* into his presentation of the harmonic resources and generalization of their customary treatment in the masterworks of the past. The materials of music are subject only to the whims of the composer, not to any pre-defined compositional system, nor should the composer compromise his artistry to the aesthetic expectations of society. The variety of subtexts scattered throughout the *Harmonielehre* consistently interrupts Schoenberg’s practical instruction, affirming what students of music history and the history of Western thought in general might already suspect—that under the pen of as controversial and revolutionary a figure as Arnold Schoenberg, a treatise on the apparent “traditional harmonic principles” of music would be anything but traditional.\(^4\)

This dissertation is an attempt to understand the motivations behind Adams’ decision to title his composition after Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre*, and to sort out the implications arising from such a deliberate juxtaposition of what might appear to be incongruous cultural artifacts. Considering the many aesthetic, speculative, historical, and philosophical discourses which unfold alongside Schoenberg’s presentation of harmony, one might be in haste to conclude that Adams’ score has “Very little” to do with “Schoenberg’s masterful text on harmony,” as did one

early critic of Adams. As much as Schoenberg insists that his book strives for nothing more than “to give the pupil a dependable method for his training,” his text is also a philosophical essay on the purpose of composition as well as a radical polemic delivered in the Geist of the German Romantic intellectual tradition. Not least, it also presents the profound logic behind Schoenberg’s now (in)famous break with tonality. I navigate through the many discursive passages of Harmonielehre for clues that may help elucidate the reasoning behind Adams’ peculiar choice for the title of his first symphony and to reflect on some of the additional insights we can gain about both works through the exploration of their interrelationship. It is arguable that Schoenberg’s Harmonielehre provides an interpretive foundation for the analysis of Adams’ score, and I therefore draw out some of the philosophical discourses present within the treatise that can be found to inform prevailing features of the composition.

I. In Search of Models: Overview and Background of John Adams’ Harmonielehre

Premiered in March 1985, the Harmonielehre of John Adams is an extended three-movement work scored for large symphonic forces. It is his third composition for orchestra, predated by an essay in orchestration, the Common Tones in Simple Time (1979) and the large cantata Harmonium for chorus and orchestra (1980-81), and it is generally credited, along with Harmonium and, later, the opera Nixon in China (1985-87) for establishing Adams as a composer of national stature.7 Organized into a fast-slow-fast template, the three movements, or

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Parts (as Adams has labeled them), feature an intriguing union of musical minimalism with late nineteenth-century lyricism that is the composition’s primary identifying attribute.

Parts I and III are characteristic of Adams’ early compositional voice in that they feature recognizably minimalist musical elements. A style of music emerging between the late 1960s and mid 1970s, minimalism can be generalized as music comprised of slowly evolving progressions of “self-contained blocks,” extended sections of music sometimes referred to as harmonic or minimalist planes. These chunks of music commonly feature regular pulsation at a bright tempo, small melodic fragments repeating seamlessly and continually throughout the entirety of the plane, and a single or primary harmony of largely tertian, diatonic construction. In particular, the pulsating, consonant harmonic planes of Steve Reich (b. 1936) are prominent in Adams’ minimalist approach. Passages within Parts I and III of the *Harmonielehre* echo the shimmering mallet textures of Reich’s particular brand of minimalism, such as those which appear in *Music for 18 Instruments* (1976).

These types of elements are absent from Part II of Adams’ score, which instead features slower tempos, denser chromatic harmonies, and extended, lyrical melodies. The distinction between Part II and the outer movements is exemplary of a conflict between minimalist and expressive, lyrical musical gestures that unfolds throughout the work. *Harmonielehre*’s length, its contrasting multi-movement design, and its large, mostly traditional instrumental contingent all speak to a late Romantic-era symphonic conception that belies Adams’ minimalist influences. These observations are confirmed by Adams, who writes that *Harmonielehre* “marries the developmental techniques of minimalism with the harmonic and expressive world of fin de siècle

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8 Dan Warburton, “A Working Terminology for Minimal Music,” *Integral* 2 (1988): 140. K. Robert Schwarz uses the term “planes” in reference to the static nature of the harmony in a section of minimalist material. See “Process vs. Intuition in the Recent Works of Steve Reich and John Adams,” *American Music* 8, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 157. Like many other “-isms,” the word minimalism was adapted from art criticism. It may have been used within musical contexts first by the British composer-critic Michael Nyman in the mid 1960s.
late Romanticism. . . The shades of Mahler, Sibelius, Debussy, and the young Schoenberg are everywhere in this strange piece.” These “shades” of late musical Romanticism partly explain Adams’ provocative title. Its evocation of Schoenberg’s treatise, a cultural artifact dating to a very specific place and time (Vienna, 1911), is exemplary of Adams’ penchant to provide titles that indicate the types of musical materials which he explores in each work. One need only think of Slonimsky’s Earbox (1996), My Father Knew Charles Ives (2003), and City Noir (2009) and their often very literal borrowing of Nicolas Slonimsky’s Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns (1947), the musical world of Ives, and the jaunty, urban, and sensual scores of 1940s’ and ’50s’ film noir, respectively. In the Harmonielehre, it is the lush orchestral and harmonic colorations of late Romantic-era symphonicism that Adams submits to his identifiably minimalist syntax.

Adams’ conscious look to the musical past was perhaps a deliberate effort to escape what he has described on more than one occasion to be the artistically constricting, “fateful cul-de-sac” of his immediate musical inheritance. Early in his career, Adams positioned himself precociously against what he felt to be an entrenched and self-referential Eurocentric model of

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9 John Adams, “Essays before an Earbox,” in the liner notes to The John Adams Earbox, Nonesuch CD 79453-2, 1999, 54-55. Adams’ extensive notes to the works contained on this 10-CD box set are also available on his official website. See, for instance, “Harmonielehre,” The John Adams Official Website, http://www.earbox.com/W-harmonielehre.html (accessed February 2, 2011). In the remainder of this dissertation, when citing portions of Adams’ notes that also appear on the website, I will refer to the website, which is likely more readily available to readers.

10 Beginning with Chamber Symphony, a number of Adams’ works are indebted to Slonimsky’s Thesaurus. See Alexander Sanchez-Behar, “Counterpoint and Polyphony in Recent Instrumental Works of John Adams” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2007), 19-29, ProQuest (AAT 3340759).

“increasingly contentious, theory-bound, abstract rationalization.” Adams matched his abrasive remarks toward modernism with compositions that featured an accessible tonal palette, bright, crisp textures, and a sardonic attitude toward musical austerity. His self-identified “Trickster” voice occupies a number of early compositions such as Grand Pianola Music (1982), The Chairman Dances (1985), and Fearful Symmetries (1988), in which the musical past, formerly held with austere sanctity, is treated with blithe irreverence. In Grand Pianola Music, for instance, pungent trombones blast V-I progressions (forbidden by modernist and “tonal” twentieth-century composers alike) while dueling pianos mock the eccentricities of the Romantic-era virtuoso concerto. The formula was one of immediate commercial appeal; Adams found in academic modernism a commonplace of mistrust and disdain shared by his listeners, and he composed music that, in its whimsical attitude toward the “seriousness” of modern music, solidified for himself a rebellious artistic persona as attractive to his listeners as his music.

Adams frequently expresses a view that the composers of the previous generation had sequestered themselves from the listening public and marginalized the place of composition and the composer. “I profoundly didn’t want to go the route of being a university composer,” Adams writes. “Something in me railed against the notion.” Having earned undergraduate and graduate degrees from Harvard by the early 1970s, Adams might very well have attained a high professorial rank and financial security teaching and composing under university patronage. As Michael Broyles explains, “Throughout most of the 1950s and ’60s the university was the patron for the composer. Few composers did not have an academic appointment.” Adams’ aversion to

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13 Adams, Hallelujah Junction, 68.
14 Michael Broyles, Mavericks and Other Traditions in American Music (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 168; emphasis in original.
pursuing an academic career may be derived from the fact that, though music and composition
departments at America’s most prestigious universities had been run by such non-modernist
composers as Hindemith, Piston, Howard Hanson, and William Schuman, they also nurtured
Princeton University composer Milton Babbitt’s model of the “composer as scientist”: “It’s hard
to describe how grim and pessimistic the world of avant-garde music had become. Babbitt’s
famous analogy in which he compared one of his compositions to a paper to be delivered at a
scientific conference perfectly sums up the mindset of the era.”\(^\text{15}\) John Cage provided an
alternative compositional model. Adams was enchanted by the writings and philosophies of
Cage, and after leaving East-Coast academia for California, he spent many of his early years in
San Francisco writing electronic and experimental music, “teaching kids [at the San Francisco
Conservatory of Music] how to toss coins and consult the I Ching,” and organizing new music
concerts.\(^\text{16}\) Still, Adams describes the decade leading up to his Harmonielehre as one of
“tremendous internal disconnect”:

> We would present concerts with my students of “experimental” music, many of which
were stupefyingly tedious, and I’d look out and see the audience sitting there with a
blank, bored expression on their faces—what little audience we could ever get! . . .
Clearly there was something in me that needed more expressive meaning from the music.
And, of course, Cage is all about *not* being expressive.\(^\text{17}\)

Similar to the prospect of an academic career, the Cageian paradigm proved unsatisfactory for
the type of creative expression Adams sought. And it would not solve the problem, he believed,
that “With the passing of the era of Stravinsky, Shostakovich, and Bartók, the place of the

\(^{15}\) Adams and May, “John Adams Reflects,” 8 and 24.
\(^{16}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., 12-13.
‘classical’ composer in our society had begun to shrink rapidly, to become obscure, hyperdefined, marginalized.”

Adams found his minimalist language at the same time that minimalism was becoming institutionalized. Following the success of *Harmonium* and his rabble-rousing *Grand Pianola Music*, Adams was featured alongside Steve Reich and Philip Glass in an article in *Time Magazine* profiling the arrival of minimalism into “mainstream” contemporary music. More importantly, he received a commission subsidized by four notable institutions: the Meet the Composer Orchestra Residencies Program, the Exxon Corporation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Adams suddenly had the prestige of an established composer, or, at least, the publicity of one. And, as composer-in-residence with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, he had at his disposal an elite orchestra. The expectations of the commission were clear: the Orchestra Residencies Program was founded in 1982 with the purpose of revitalizing contemporary American orchestral music, a genre many believed had become irrelevant. Certainly, the occasion demanded a work more solemn than *Grand Pianola Music* and more substantial than his only previous composition for solely orchestral forces, the *Common Tones in Simple Time* of 1979.

*Harmonielehre* represents the culmination of Adams’ artistic self-discovery. It is a symphony in all but name intended as a legitimate contribution to the orchestral canon, and thus

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20 See James S. Ball, “A Conductor’s Guide to Selected Contemporary American Orchestral Compositions,” (DMA diss., University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1992), 126, ProQuest (AAT 9312258). Writing in 1978, composer-critic Tom Johnson delineated six prevalent “forms” of new music. Orchestral music was not among them, leaving Johnson to wonder, “Whatever happened to the symphony? the tone poem? the song cycle? the oratorio? the cantata? the sonata? the prelude? the rondo? One might occasionally run across a composer who still turns back to one of them, but by and large these forms are dead. They were supposed to die. We killed them and we were glad we did.” Tom Johnson, “New Forms of New Music” [*The Village Voice*, September 4, 1978], in *The Voice of New Music: New York City, 1972-1982 – A Collection of Articles Originally Published in the Village Voice* (Eindhoven, The Netherlands: Apollohuis, 1989), 331.
carries all the implications of a work that is definitive in its exhibition of Adams’ early artistic principles. In this regard, it is similar to the Harmonielehre of Schoenberg, itself an important “first” in terms of Schoenberg’s pedagogical-theoretical writings, as well as a personal artistic expression detailing the profound thought process behind his recent arrival at atonality. Further, any affinity Adams may have felt toward Schoenberg as one in a lineage of young composers descending from his teachings (through his studies with Leon Kirchner at Harvard) is augmented by the conspicuous parallels between the careers of both composers at the outset of their respective Harmonielehren. Adams was thirty-seven years old when he began work on his Harmonielehre. Schoenberg was thirty-six. Like Schoenberg, Adams experienced his first real success after composing his large cantata, Harmonium (Schoenberg would remark that performances of his Gurrelieder secured supporters despite its orchestration remaining incomplete until 1913). And though his Grand Pianola Music was not as adventurous compositionally as Schoenberg’s early atonal music, Adams garnered a bit of notoriety with the intentionally offensive work.


More importantly, Adams, like Schoenberg, was at odds with the musical culture and compositional paths of his time. The composition’s title, invoking the text in which Schoenberg articulates the profound logic behind his break with the past, is thus an important signifier of Adams’ impasse with his own immediate musical inheritance, an inheritance shaped in large part by Schoenberg’s artistic ideologies. His allusion to the *Harmonielehre* of Schoenberg establishes a philosophical program through which Adams both rejects prevailing aesthetics and expresses a creative identification that is complementary to and contrasts the artistic ideals presented in Schoenberg’s treatise.

**II. The Scope and Methodology of this Dissertation**

I have divided this dissertation into two parts, each containing a chapter of commentary on the *Harmonielehre* of Schoenberg and a chapter of analysis and discussion of Adams’ composition. The examination of language in this study is as important as the analysis of Adams’ score. By first elucidating the various discourses and subtexts of Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre*, I will show how Adams’ composition not only responds to the treatise, but also enters a centuries-old cultural discourse among literary, philosophical, and musical figures that includes Schoenberg, Jean-Philippe Rameau, Ferruccio Busoni, Friedrich Schiller, Carl Gustav Jung, and ancient writers such as Boethius, Augustine, and Aristotle. It is a conversation rooted in ideals of nature, of artistic expression, of craftsmanship, and of artistic truth that requires an interdisciplinary mode of inquiry. An understanding of the philosophical threads within which Adams situates his music begins with an examination of Schoenberg’s treatise. This dissertation thus takes on elements of literary criticism by seeking thematic patterns in Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre* and by analyzing the rhetorical devices, diction, analogies and metaphors, and
polemical language through which he presents a deeply thoughtful, highly individual, and engaging presentation of the nature and evolution of harmony.

By taking careful efforts to navigate Schoenberg’s prose, I seek to contribute a fresh voice to a body of scholarship that has treated the relationship between the two Harmonielehren as ancillary, or that has sought to situate Adams’ score within only the practical, theoretical discourses of Schoenberg’s treatise. Christo Jankowitz and Mary Rörich are guided to a greater extent by postmodern criticism than by aspects of Schoenberg’s prose. Examining the intertextual relationship between the score’s Romantic-era musical allusions and its minimalist operations, they argue that Adams’ interesting combination of musical elements is intended as a parody of the emotionally detached and harmonically static nature of minimalism.\(^\text{23}\) In Chapters 3 and 5, I similarly explore the ways in which Adams’ composition subverts priorities of minimalism, but I see this subversion as directed more toward the philosophies of musical modernism, in general. Adams’ relegation of minimalist elements to that of sub-surface, structural utility seems contradictory to parody, which seeks to emphasize a given cultural artifact through its imitation or caricature. Jankowitz and Rörich seem more on point when they identify Romantic-era musical features, even specific compositions, at work on the surface of Adams’ score. In this regard, the content of Schoenberg’s treatise means less to them as an interpretative text than its title does as a signifier of compositions dating to around 1911 to which Adams alludes purposefully in the Harmonielehre or that “were very present in his thoughts when he was drafting it.”\(^\text{24}\)

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\(^{24}\) Ibid., 20.
The interpretation that Schoenberg’s treatise performs as a marker for the types of late Romantic-era musical materials that Adams explores in his *Harmonielehre* is validated by the handful of examinations of the score which discuss some aspect of musical allusion or quotation. Like Jankowitz and Rörich, Sandra Müller-Berg identifies a range of compositions, from Schoenberg’s *Kammersymphonie*, *Erwartung*, and *Gurrelieder*, to the opera, *Elektra*, of Richard Strauss and the Fourth Symphony of Sibelius, which inform Adams’ *Harmonielehre*. Müller-Berg recognizes that Adams’ intent is not to quote these compositions directly, but rather to recreate the expressive soundscape of the orchestral medium at the time that Schoenberg was writing his treatise.²⁵ The most obvious case of musical borrowing takes place in Part II, “The Anfortas Wound,” in which Adams reconstructs a large orchestral gesture that appears in the first and third movements of Gustav Mahler’s unfinished Tenth Symphony.²⁶ Less perceptible is a descending chromatic figure which Jankowitz and Rörich identify as a Wagnerian leitmotif; though, equally convincing is Brandon Derfler’s interpretation that Adams has instead taken the figure from one of the musical examples in Schoenberg’s treatise.²⁷ In Chapter 5, I similarly concentrate on the imitation of one artifact in particular: the third movement, *Farben*, of Schoenberg’s *Fünf Orchesterstücke*, Op. 16 (1909). Adams seemingly adapts Schoenberg’s *Farben* texture as a cantus firmus, as a structural, harmonic, and timbral foundation above which he contributes new material. In other words, I intend to show not just that Adams has borrowed a pre-existing musical setting, but, rather, to describe the ways in which he has appropriated and


²⁶ Müller-Berg examines Adams’ adaptation of Mahler’s passages in Chapter 7 of her study. See pp. 170-76.

reshaped the materials to meet his own artistic objectives. It is through a discussion of musical material, craft, and imitation that I link this particular example of musical borrowing back to the *Harmonielehre* of Schoenberg. I am interested in the relationship between the composition and Schoenberg’s prose, and I argue that the significance between the two lies beyond cursory relationships such as dates.

The studies which have examined Adams’ score in relation to Schoenberg’s actual prose are fewer in number. Brandon Derfler and Sandra Müller-Berg conduct Schoenbergian analyses of Adams’ *Harmonielehre*. Put more simply, they seek to examine the composition according to theoretical principles presented in the text. Müller-Berg outlines several concepts of Schoenberg’s tonal theory before presenting an analysis of each of the composition’s three parts, including their indebtedness to Romantic-era works. She argues that the *Harmonielehre* of Schoenberg not only is a marker of the composition’s Romantic-era musical models, but also is itself a theoretical model for Adams’ treatment of harmony in the *Harmonielehre*.²⁸ Derfler’s analysis is smaller in scope. His focus is not on Schoenberg’s broader harmonic theory, but on his concept of “fluctuating tonality,” the notion that a composition’s tonic key can be from its outset less definitive and thus susceptible to “rival tonics.” Derfler argues that this principle manifests itself as a large-scale formal device in Adams’ *Harmonielehre*, and he uses the concept of “fluctuating tonality” to present an analysis of the score’s central harmonic conflict between E minor and E-flat major.²⁹

This dissertation makes no attempt at a comprehensive formal analysis of Adams’ *Harmonielehre*. Müller-Berg presents chapter-long analyses of each of its three parts, Ball provides overviews of the three movements, and Greenough and Pellegrino interpret structural

²⁸ Müller-Berg, “*Tonal harmony is like a natural force,”* 23.

²⁹ Derfler, “*Two Harmonielehren,”* 20-38.
demarcations through their respective examinations of density in Part I and harmonic-textural stratification in Part III. 30 Harmonic reductions of the first movement can be found in Johnson, Derfler, and Barsom, and Fink provides an interesting, albeit concentrated examination of the movement’s melodic-linear development. 31 My own brief analysis of the composition’s structural divisions is presented in Chapter 3, Table 1, where I contend that Harmonielehre is best viewed in terms of large-scale characteristic gestures—in contrast to exact thematic repetitions or recapitulations—which alternate across the entirety of the symphony. The alternation of these two gestures, usually separated by one of two transitional passages, forges the type of dramatic conflict characteristic of the symphonic genre in its opposition of stylistic and anachronistic material: pointed and repetitive minimalist melodic statements, consisting mostly of only one or two pitches, and broad lyrical gestures, often placed in registral extremes, which echo the expressive melodic palette of late nineteenth-century Viennese musical Romanticism.

What I do seek to accomplish in my music analyses is to establish clear connections between the philosophical content of Schoenberg’s treatise and elements of Adams’ score. Therefore, in lieu of broader, large-scale analysis, I most often take localized musical events as starting places for my discussions of the ways in which Adams’ compositional approach reflects


thematic priorities of Schoenberg’s prose. I hold these localized “snapshots” to be exemplary of the ways in which Adams fashions his materials throughout the composition, and by detailing the features and broader implications of a single passage within a movement, I seek to work out more thoroughly the salient interrelationships that can be determined to exist between the *Harmonielehren*.

There remains a significant lacuna in our understanding of the rich and varied discourses which color Schoenberg’s text and their relationship to Adams’ composition. This dissertation is partly an attempt to fill this vacuum, with the equally significant purpose of more fully understanding the artistic conceptions of both composers through comparison of the artistic priorities observable within their *Harmonielehren*. In Part 1 of this study, comprised of Chapters 2 and 3, I examine the ways in which the *Harmonielehren* of Adams and Schoenberg confront the aesthetic expectations of their individual times and places. Burdened by compositional models presumed to be aesthetically superior, both composers create works which take these models as their underlying discourses. Tonality and minimalism (representing modernist objectives such as strict rationality) operate in the respective works as organizing elements for philosophical and musical discourses that are intent on undermining them.

The irony that Schoenberg would write a treatise on mostly tonal harmonic resources at the same time he was moving into new harmonic terrains is reflected in the conflicted nature of the text. Chapter 2 examines this paradox while detailing the circumstances surrounding Schoenberg’s decision to write his *Harmonielehre*. It would appear that Schoenberg’s intent is to present the tonal system as merely one possibility of shaping musical material, and to detail its imperfections in order to undermine its continued validity as the predominant compositional model of his time. By demonstrating the inconsistencies of tonality’s so-called “laws” with the
masterworks of the past and with the “natural model” (the harmonic series), Schoenberg effectively challenges what he characterizes as an oppressive indoctrination of tonality by those who consider it to be the definitive model.

In Part 1, Chapter 3, I demonstrate the ways in which Adams similarly confronts the aesthetic priorities of his generation. Working from the minimalist musical style forged by Steve Reich and Philip Glass, Adams draws on minimalist devices, but he nonetheless forsakes the rationality and non-dramatic musical frameworks which defined early minimalism. These features are vestiges of the modernist aesthetic within which minimalism remained more or less entrenched at the time that Adams composed his *Harmonielehre*. Similar to Schoenberg’s presentation of tonality, which in fact subverts the notion of tonality as a single viable musical language, Adams’ reliance on minimalism as a syntactical agent undermines its vanguardism by creating a work of melodic and harmonic conflict and repose that recalls values of the musical experience possibly divorced from both minimalism and the sometimes hyper-complex, rational, non-expressive palette of post-War modernism. I thus equate Adams’ treatment of minimalism to Schoenberg’s presentation of tonality. Both are fundamental to the respective works, but both represent aesthetic priorities with which neither Schoenberg nor Adams is content.

Part 2 of this dissertation is about defining Adams’ creative identification through an analysis of contrasting authorial voices at work in Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre*. I draw out two varying identifications present in the text—that of the craftsman and the artistic truth seeker—and seek to define Adams and Schoenberg through these respective labels. In Chapter 4, I detail Schoenberg’s extensive discourse of musical craftsmanship, a discourse on which he draws to establish his authority as composer over his materials, and as author of the treatise, over the knowledge and properties of music. By emphasizing his first-hand experience working with and
fashioning the materials of music, Schoenberg seeks to place himself above aestheticians and other commentators who do not practice the art of composition. Nevertheless, his artistic impulse to discover new types of musical materials and models for creative expression eventually overshadows his dialogue of compositional handicraft. Schoenberg personifies the artist as truth seeker, one who quests restlessly to work beyond established models, a creative identification which he advocates seemingly above that of the musical craftsman.

In Chapter 5, I situate Adams’ *Harmonielehre* within Schoenberg’s discourse of musical craftsmanship. Adams’ compositional process reflects what Schoenberg consistently describes as the craftsman’s struggle to shape musical materials. Adams works within the established genre of the symphony but also takes as his model such late Romantic-era pieces as Schoenberg’s *Farben*, Movement III, of the *Fünf Orchesterstücke*. I examine the ways that Adams appropriates the opening passage of Schoenberg’s *Farben* in his composition as a ground for new musical material in the same way that composers for centuries had reshaped pre-existing musical artifacts for their own expressive purposes. Significantly, Adams’ approach to Schoenberg’s *Farben* is exemplary of the way in which he similarly adapts minimalism as a *continuo* for the surface-level presentation of contrasting minimalist and Romantic-lyrical melodic gestures. Adams’ *Harmonielehre* reflects a fitting-together-of found musical resources, an artistic conception which contrasts the concerted effort to seek out and forge new materials and methods of musical expression modeled by Schoenberg in his *Harmonielehre*.

As much as this study is an attempt to clarify the relationship between Adams’ composition and the *Harmonielehre* of Schoenberg, its broader purpose is to more fully characterize Adams’ role as a composer and artist in contemporary American society. Consequently, while my objective is to elucidate connections between the two works, I often
widen my observations to include other scores and creative projects throughout Adams’ career that are demonstrative of the types of musical-philosophical issues I find to be at work in the *Harmonielehre*. The introductions to Parts 1 and 2 of this dissertation serve as fertile grounds for discussions of the place of Adams’ *Harmonielehre* within both the artistic-political climate of the late 1970s and early 1980s and his larger compositional oeuvre. Readers will find references to and brief analyses of works ranging from *American Standard, Grand Pianola Music*, and *Light Over Water*, to *On the Transmigration of Souls* and *City Noir*. Adams consistently displays an interest in situating his compositions within larger cultural discourses. By closely examining the connections between his music and one of these discourses—that of the musical-historical narrative arising from the philosophies and compositional legacy of Arnold Schoenberg—I seek to understand the ways in which contemporary artists such as Adams engage the broader cultural dialogue in their art as a means through which to define and articulate their creative voices.
PART 1

“TO HELL WITH ALL THESE THEORIES”: IMPASSES AND OPPOSITION

Christian Zeal and Activity, John Adams’ earliest commercially-released composition, is also one of his simplest. Adams is known primarily for his elaborate symphonic gestures and multi-media operatic productions. But his 1973 composition for unspecified chamber ensemble and pre-recorded tape consists solely of an uncomplicated instrumental arrangement of the Protestant hymn, “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” and a taped, on-air conversation between the host of a radio show and a listener.\(^1\) As the recording plays above the slow-moving chorale, the dialogue unfolds as an argument over creationism, the validity of the Bible, and the concept of God. The caller, an evangelical preacher, is unable to argue his position successfully against the quick-firing host, who ridicules the manner in which he presents his beliefs. In spotlighting the often contentious dialogue between America’s evangelical and secular communities, Christian Zeal demonstrates in Adams a political and social consciousness not uncommon to his mode of artistic expression. Adams’ title seemingly refers to the radicalized, even destructive defense of religion presented in the unsung hymn’s portrayal of martial conflict,\(^2\) and in the caller’s confused and sometimes disturbing articulation (“If you reject the word of God, then . . . it’s no hope at all for you. You might as well just put a gun to your temple and pull the trigger.”) of Christian evangelical convictions.

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Though much different musically than anything Adams has since produced, *Christian Zeal* highlights an ideological theme present in more than a few of his early compositions, that of fanatical indoctrination and the consequences therein. Religiously, this theme likewise frames Adams’ controversial second opera, *The Death of Klinghoffer* (1990-91), inspired by the real-life hijacking of an ocean liner by Islamic terrorists and their subsequent execution of a handicapped American Jew.³ It is also present in his *Shaker Loops* (1978, rev. 1983), which conjures images of a charismatic and puritanical Shaker community living in self-imposed isolation. Adams plays on another type of fanaticism in *Nixon in China* (1985-87), whose title character’s fervor for media attention subverts the potential benefit of true cultural exchange. And for his orchestral diptych *El Dorado* (1991), Adams writes an environmentalist program which draws attention to the devastation of the natural environment brought on by unsustainable over-harvesting.

The pervasiveness of these types of depictions in Adams’ early compositional oeuvre arises undoubtedly from the increasingly radicalized American political climate of the late 1960s and 1970s within which Adams was fully immersed as a student at Harvard and young professional in San Francisco.⁴ But Adams’ artistic voice was shaped additionally by the sometimes rigid dogmatic positions that dominated the mid-twentieth century new music culture in which he matured. The isolationist creed of such religious communities as the Shakers is mirrored in Milton Babbitt’s ideal of the “composer as specialist,” one who accepts “total, resolute, and voluntary withdrawal from th[e] public world to one of private performance and electronic media, with its very real possibility of complete elimination of the public and social


aspects of musical composition.” Likewise, Adams has characterized Arnold Schoenberg as a “religious zealot cutting off his genitals to prove how totally pure he is, how dedicated to the Lord,” invoking the same type of destructive (a)moral excess implicit in Christian Zeal, Klinghoffer, and El Dorado. The Shaker Loops, of course, does not specifically refer to Babbitt, nor does Adams associate Schoenberg with Christian Zeal; however, Adams’ titles and programs pinpoint his infatuation with a sort of radicalized zeal that also colors his observations on twentieth-century music. Once referring to the 1950s and ’60s as “a really dark time for composition,” Adams composed music in response to what he would come to view as a “grim and pessimistic” atonal orthodoxy foundering in its excessive, self-referential abstraction: “it was no secret that the audience [for] classical music during the twentieth century was rapidly shrinking, in no small part because of the aural ugliness of so much of the new work being written.” Drawing once again on religious imagery, he describes the opening of his Harmonielehre as no less than an “exorcism” of aesthetic conformity; the orchestra pounds forty incomplete E minor triads at triple fortissimo in open violation of serialism’s restrictions.

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9 Adams quoted in Jonathan Cott, liner notes to John Adams, Harmonielehre, San Francisco Symphony dir. Edo de Waart, Nonesuch CD 79115-2, 1985; reprinted in Cott, Back to a Shadow in the Night: Music Writings and Interviews, 1968-2001 (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2002), 161. Adams recalls a tremendous creative block, caused in part by his attempts to appeal to some higher aesthetic ethics, which impeded his early efforts to compose Harmonielehre: “Day after day, with what I deemed Yankee rectitude and Protestant work ethic, I would lock myself in my studio and try any and all tricks to unravel the thread of what had become a perfect tangle of reasons as to why everything I was doing was wrong, ‘aesthetically unethical,’ or in bad taste, or not sophisticated enough.” Hallelujah Junction, 128.
against the use of overt tertian sonorities and repetition, both of which reinforced the dated conventions of tonality.

Adams is not the only composer of his generation to pinpoint “the aural ugliness” of the twentieth-century as the main contributing factor for audience antipathy for new music and the diminished relevance of the modern composer. Ten years older than Adams, Philip Glass took a particularly antagonistic stance against European avant-gardism, once describing Pierre Boulez’s Domaine Musical series as “a wasteland, dominated by these maniacs, these creeps, who were trying to make everyone write this crazy creepy music.” Indeed, Anne C. Shreffler identifies this type of oppositional identification as “a modern coming-of-age ritual by composers who wish to write more accessible music and who have for personal psychological reasons conjured up a mythical repressive force that allegedly prevented them from doing so earlier.” The oft-recited twentieth-century musical-historical narrative of a dominant and oppressive serial-atonal model prompted Joseph N. Straus to examine the period between the 1950s and early 1970s statistically. His quantitative appraisal of what was in all actuality a limited incursion by serial composers into the musical spheres of academia, publication and performance, and critical achievement provides a welcome and sober voice within the often heated discussion of serialism’s impact on contemporary music. Part of the serial-atonal model’s “mythologized” dominance over traditionally or tonally oriented composers, Straus concludes, is that it provides a useful “scapegoat” for concert attendees’ lack of interest in new


music, despite the fact that new music has held a “precarious status” within musical culture since
the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{14}

Whether or not Adams truly subscribes to Henry Pleasants’ proverbial “agony of modern
music,” in his compositions, as well as his writings, composition descriptions, and interviews, he
certainly exploits his self-assumed oppositional stance against the perceived academic serial-
atonal hegemony.\textsuperscript{15} In \textit{Grand Pianola Music (GPM)}, for instance, Adams satirizes the dogmatic
in music. The inverse of modernist solemnity, \textit{GPM} is a composition equal to and opposite the
hyper-rationalized, hyper-cultivated language of integral serialism. Adams as parodist assumes
the role of tonal fanatic, “a hyperreal composer of hypertonal music,” writes Robert Fink, who
insists that “no one can be a real composer of tonal art music in late 20th-century America.”\textsuperscript{16}
Serial rows are eschewed for diatonicism, a memorable, singable melody, and periodicity;
pointillism is snubbed for homophonic textures, lyrical themes, steady pulse, and brash
arpeggios; the bright, pulsating sonorities of Reichian minimalism are submitted to V-I
progressions in Beethoven’s “heroic” E-flat major; and fragments of different tonal styles come
together in a postmodernist celebration of the irrational.\textsuperscript{17} “This piece is like a barking dog
running around with no leash,” Adams quips.\textsuperscript{18} “It is my truant child, the one that antagonizes

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 334.

Pleasants’ phrase in his note to \textit{Harmonielehre}. See “Harmonielehre,” http://www.earbox.com/W-
harmonielehre.html.

\textsuperscript{16} Robert Wallace Fink, “‘Arrows of Desire’: Long-Range Linear Structure and the Transformation of
Musical Energy” (PhD diss., University of California-Berkeley, 1994), 282, ProQuest (AAT 9529300); emphasis in
original.

\textsuperscript{17} “Dueling pianos, cooing sirens, Valhalla brass, thwacking bass drums, gospel triads, and a Niagara of
cascading flat keys all learned to cohabit as I wrote the piece.” Adams quoted in Sarah Cahill, \textit{“Grand Pianola
Reader}, ed. May, 89.

\textsuperscript{18} Adams quoted in Ross, “The Harmonist,” 37.
those listeners overburdened with good taste.” In short, GPM is a home run swing toward the pole that is opposite from establishment modernism, an intentionally vulgar expression bred in the cause of gravitating musical aesthetics toward some untenable center.

Fink’s observations, referring not merely to the John Adams of GPM, but rather to the Adams of the 1980s, confirm that Adams’ exaggerated aesthetic is a calculated response, an acknowledgement of the ironic limitations on expressive freedom in a culture of new music that had use only for radicalized originality. Elliot Schwartz and Daniel Godfrey craft a historical narrative of the twentieth century in which artistic recognition was earned through vanguardism:

If there has been any common goal among twentieth-century composers it is one of freedom: freedom from assumptions about what music should sound like and how, where, and when it should be performed, and freedom to explore all sonic possibilities, whatever their source. But some have felt in retrospect that, before the mid-1970s, the institutions of new music seemed to replace one set of assumptions with another, recognizing avant-gardisms and obvious departures from the past as assertions of creative freedom while dismissing anything more familiar or approachable as reactionary.

Likewise, Robert Carl, attempting to rationalize the term “postmodernism” as it relates to such artists as Adams, speaks of the “aesthetic constraints” of the postwar musical culture from which it departs:

All that [postmodernism] indicates is that among serious artists an era of orthodoxy has now passed, and that no set model has yet emerged to fill the vacuum. The previous postwar orthodoxy, modernism, was often hermetic and dictatorial, and after a long claustrophobic period the new absence of aesthetic constraints on artists has been tonic. Before, there was an almost puritanical emphasis on serious, utopian, self-consciously abstract art, which had drained much of the delight, charm, and sensuality from creation, alienating artists as well as audiences from their own work.

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19 Adams, Hallelujah Junction, 118.
The irony of a tyrannical modernist-atonal hegemony, if measured only by its “prestige,” is reflected in Adams’ decision to title his first symphony after the *Harmonielehre* of Schoenberg. Schoenberg’s treatise is a polemic not only against the predominant tonal model of his own time, but also against any “laws” or expectations that would govern the individual expression of an artist. In contrast to such outspoken polemicists as Pierre Boulez and Charles Wuorinen, for whom the only viable model at one time was serialism, Schoenberg writes, “The artist does nothing [so] that others will consider [it] beautiful; he does, rather, only what is necessary for him to do.”

Claiming to have “aimed [*Harmonielehre*] directly at the East Coast musical establishment,” Adams, like Schoenberg, considers his *Harmonielehre* a polemic. Consequently, one could argue that it represents an expression of artistic freedom similar to the one conveyed in Schoenberg’s text. The purpose of the following two chapters is to inquire whether principal characteristics of Adams’ *Harmonielehre* admit to such a conception. I first briefly detail the circumstances surrounding Schoenberg’s paradoxical decision to write a *Harmonielehre* at the same time that he was leaving tonality behind in his own composition. Schoenberg may have desired to improve his station financially and professionally, but writing the treatise also provided an opportunity to challenge the presumptions of the musical past and to present the case for his progressive harmonic conception. Chapter 2 thus prefaces my discussion of Adams’ *Harmonielehre* with a close reading of Schoenberg’s treatise which details some of

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the ways in which he portrays systematic instruction in tonality as indoctrination in one exclusive
model. Seeking to instill a more liberal artistic mindset in his readers, Schoenberg advocates
alternative creative models centered in the artist’s finer attunement to both the natural, physical
properties of the tone and to his inner, intuitive artistic impulses.

In Chapter 3, I analyze the ways in which Adams’ *Harmonielehre* likewise confronts the
aesthetic expectations of his own age, namely puritan attitudes toward compositional objectivity
and vanguardism. Adams’ creative approach from this period (roughly 1977-1990) demonstrates
a peculiar adaptation of minimalism, itself a modernist aesthetic which, despite emerging largely
as a reaction to serialism and aleatoric music, retained the objectivist and experimentalist
aesthetic proclivities of both. *Harmonielehre* abandons these avant-gardisms. Adams mines
minimalism for its steady pulse, its tonal structures, its repeated and interwoven rhythms, and its
canonic fragments, thereby stripping these elements from minimalism’s aesthetics of serial
rationality and experimentalist non-linearity. I situate Adams’ *Harmonielehre* within the
literature and theoretical discourse surrounding early minimalism in order to show how the
composition departs from what scholars have identified as the modernist objectives of
minimalism.

The *Harmonielehre* of John Adams is almost systematic in its dissolution of twentieth-
century modernism in a way remarkably similar to Schoenberg’s critical deconstruction of
tonality in his own *Harmonielehre*. I contend, thus, that Adams’ rejection of aesthetic
hierarchies, and the exclusionist artistic views therein, parallels Schoenberg’s oppositional stance
against the tonal orthodoxy at which he directed his treatise. With this understanding of the
interrelationship between the two *Harmonielehren*, minimalism and tonality in the respective
works seemingly become only the pretense for an ancillary rhetoric by which both composers articulate their impasses with the aesthetic priorities of their respective cultural environments.
CHAPTER 2

Schoenberg and the Challenge to Musical Tradition

Schoenberg . . . sought to strip away from his work all vestiges of convention, which he regarded as repressive ideology, and he plunged inward to cultivate what he took as authentic, intensely organic subjectivity: indeed, a subjectivity capable of producing its own self-generated objectivity.

--Susan McClary

Napoleon, who installs his relatives and friends on the European thrones. I think that would indeed be enough to explain why one is justified in obeying the will of the fundamental tone: gratefulness to the progenitor and dependence on him. He is Alpha and Omega. That is morally right, so long as no other moral code obtains.

--Arnold Schoenberg

Schoenberg’s striking description of tonality is just one of many illustrative, commonplace examples he uses in the Harmonielehre to articulate his theories and philosophies. For instance, arguing the then unconventional position that a musical composition need not begin and conclude with the triad on the fundamental, or tonic, pitch, Schoenberg points out that biographers will not always begin and conclude with the birth and death of their subject, but will often select a markedly productive period to profile in more detail. Or, berating unnamed harmony textbooks for teaching students to conceptualize dissonance as subsidiary embellishment—in particular, Schoenberg blasts the practice of ornamenting metrically weaker units of a measure with non-harmonic tones—Schoenberg likens such techniques to those of architects who “stick cheap stucco over every smooth, straight surface, merely because its practitioners cannot bear smooth surfaces and strait lines.”

In the epigram above, Schoenberg equates the tonic pitch of a given key with a dictator whose name, when uttered, reverberates

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3 Ibid., 202. See also the translator’s note, p. 14n1. A number of similarly rich metaphors illuminate Schoenberg’s text.
today one hundred years later and an ocean apart from the European audience to whom Schoenberg directed his prose. In a text that uses witty and insightful, yet everyday metaphors, Schoenberg’s allusion to autocracy stands out as conspicuously ideological. It resonates in particular when placed next to similar political metaphors at the core of Schoenberg’s musical-philosophical legacy, specifically his notion of an emancipated dissonance, and the democratic implications of composing with twelve equal tones. And it likewise sheds light on McClary’s characterization of Schoenberg’s early compositional path—his expressionistic break with the “repressive ideology” of formerly unquestioned musical principles, and his ultimate arrival at serialism. Consequently, while the purpose of Schoenberg’s passage is to more vividly portray his speculations concerning the natural origins of key center, it is not too far a stretch to extend his Napoleonic depiction of the supremacy of tonic beyond notions of key center and onto tonality itself.

Such passages as these are pervasive in a treatise that Schoenberg seemingly intended to offer without pretense. In many ways a polemic against what he considered the “restrictive demands” (einengenden Zwang) of an imperfect, yet pervasive tonal model, Harmonielehre betrays Schoenberg’s stated goal to present a “good course in handicraft,” a “method of teaching . . . whose organization may aim, sensibly and practically, towards the goals of instruction” in

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4 One of the principle rhetorical attributes of tonality is its ability within a composition to convey a sense of closure, satisfaction, and rest by cadencing in the same key in which the work begins. The cause behind such closure, Schoenberg speculates, is the harmonic series, the influence of which on the cultivation of Western music was first proposed by Jean Philippe Rameau over 180 years earlier. The diatonic scale and triad of a tonic pitch Do are melodic and harmonic representations of the harmonic series inherent in that tonic. The key center holds sovereignty over these pitches not only because it is stronger, but because the other tones owe their very existence to the fundamental sounding tone. See also Schoenberg’s extension of this metaphor in his discussion of modulation in Theory of Harmony, 150-51.
the craft of composition. To some extent, he succeeds in presenting fairly traditional views of harmonic fundamentals. Reviewers exposed seemingly only to this content (for instance, as it appears in the first, abridged English translation by Robert D. W. Adams) have characterized it as “a highly conservative book of instruction in traditional harmony,” “another compilation of traditional harmonic principles,” and “a traditionally-based treatise on tonal harmony in general and on classical harmony in particular.” R. D. W. Adams is more or less on point when he prefaces his 1948 translation with the supposition that “some American readers may be surprised, perhaps a bit disappointed, to find here a treatise on traditional harmony, handled from a conservative, even strict point of view, when they may have expected a dissertation on the twelve-tone system or a survey of ‘ultra-modern’ harmony.”

Acknowledging an implicit indebtedness to the prevalent theories and teachings of the previous few decades, Schoenberg spends little time identifying or summing up the existing body of harmonic-theoretical literature. He adopts the persona of the master carpenter (Tischlermeister), promoting his first-hand experience working with and studying the materials of music as a composer and student of the literature above the type of knowledge to be gained through university schooling and textbooks. In making his objectives clear that he intended the Harmonielehre as a method of practical instruction, rather than a system of theoretical principles, Schoenberg partly addresses

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5 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 29, 12, and 11; emphasis in original. Schoenberg’s identification of composition as craft (Handwerk) is a useful metaphor to which he repeatedly returns to describe both the acquisition of technique and the plight of the composer in dealing with the materials of music. See Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation for a more thorough discussion of musical craftmanship in the Harmonielehre.


what modern readers might observe as a fascinating contradiction: his willingness to author a
treatise on tonal practice at the same time that he was leaving it behind in his own music. When
he began to write the treatise in June 1910, he had already completed his first post-tonal works.
He was living the life of the romanticized, misunderstood artistic genius, subsisting on revenue
from his painting and his small composition studio, and on money given to him by Gustav
Schoenberg and others “reacted . . . to the commercial depravity of the traditional idiom. It
formulated an antithesis against the extension of the culture industry into its own domain.”\footnote{Ibid.} To
write a treatise in the tonal practice, which Schoenberg was convinced had run its course and
from which he actively sought to move past, would seem only to foster the sustained validity of
an outdated and commercially perverted artistic language.
In spite of these concerns, producing an extensive treatise on traditional harmony offered Schoenberg certain practical incentives. Bryan R. Simms details the potential professional significance of such a document:

The advantages of writing a major theoretical work overrode Schoenberg's disdain for conventional theory and his occasional skepticism about any intellectualization of music. In practical terms, a harmony textbook proved useful to him in his work as a teacher. It also helped to compensate for his lack of a university degree in pursuing employment as an institutional teacher of music.\textsuperscript{12}

At Vienna’s Akademie für Musik und darstellende Kunst, the institution’s two long-standing and musically conservative composition instructors Hermann Grädener and Robert Fuchs would soon be retiring, and the academy’s administration, Wilhelm Bopp in particular, was seeking a more forward-thinking replacement. Consequently, Simms infers, Schoenberg’s treatise, with its traditional harmonic instruction and considerable subtext concerning the direction of music, was written in part to demonstrate for the board his authority both to teach conventional practice and “to bring in new thinking about theory and modern music, something that Bopp considered necessary for the Academy’s composition faculty.”\textsuperscript{13}


I submit further that Schoenberg may have wished to capitalize on the vogue of *Harmonielehren* published in the first decade of the twentieth century. The number of treatises on harmony, both “speculative” and practical, rose steadily throughout the nineteenth century and flourished particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. One text, Ernst Friedrich Richter’s *Lehrbuch der Harmonie* (1853), which Schoenberg criticized for its “much too artless and primitive” modulatory techniques, had reached its twenty-fifth edition by 1907. Schoenberg likely viewed Richter’s treatise as exemplary of a compositional-pedagogical system divorced from contemporary practice. As is often remarked, nineteenth-century harmonic theory consistently lagged behind contemporary compositional methods. Writing around 1820, the composer and theorist Gottfried Weber observed and criticized this tendency, and Robert Wason describes an “ever-widening gap between theory and compositional practice which

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15 The term “speculative” is often used to describe treatises which deal with harmonics scientifically, empirically, or deductively, such as the works of Moritz Hauptmann (1853) and Hermann von Helmholtz (1863). In contrast, “practical” treatises, those intended as handbooks or training in composition, are perhaps best represented by the treatises of Simon Sechter (1853-54) and Ernst Friedrich Richter (1853). That abridgements of Schoenberg’s treatise appear in both German and English is evidence of the disparate nature of Schoenberg’s prose, which purports to be practical instruction in the handicraft of music composition, but nonetheless diverges into speculations on the natural origins of music. For more on nineteenth-century harmonic theory, see Wason, *Viennese Harmonic Theory*; David W. Bernstein, “Nineteenth-Century Harmonic Theory: The Austro-German Legacy,” in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. Thomas Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 778-811; and, dealing in particular with Schoenberg’s inheritance, Norton Dudeque, *Music Theory and Analysis in the Writings of Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 12-32; and Wason, review of *Theory of Harmony* (1978), by Arnold Schoenberg, trans. Roy E. Carter, *Journal of Music Theory* 25, no. 2 (Autumn 1981): 307-316.


extended throughout the nineteenth century.” In this regard, Schoenberg’s instructional objective echoes those of his contemporaries Rudolf Louis and Ludwig Thuille, who set their treatise apart from “all of the purely scientific treatments” of harmony which “have only theoretical interests in view,” and Heinrich Schenker, who maintained that his work was different from those “conceived for their own sake and apart from art.”

Regardless of any practical or financial advantages, the paradox that Schoenberg would write a treatise on tonal practice “just as he was embarking on a voyage . . . in which he would more or less permanently renounce the laws of tonality” certainly captured the attention of John Adams, and it is thus worthwhile to investigate a document that is far more complicated than its stated instructional goals, if only to derive any ulterior motivations behind its authorship. Schoenberg acknowledged that his text is not as clear and simple as he originally planned. Shortly after he published his 1922 revision of the text, he authorized his student Erwin Stein to write a handbook that omitted the treatise’s wealth of speculative digressions, historical musings, and aesthetic declarations. It is not insignificant that a number of scholars have found these sections far more interesting than Schoenberg’s presentation of harmony. In an unused fragment

18 Wason, *Viennese Harmonic Theory*, 68. Wason writes that by the 1840s, pedagogical handbooks on harmony “consist mainly of watered-down tenets” of figured bass or Rameauian fundamental bass theory that “are never tested in musical analysis.” For instance, he describes Sechter’s *Die Grundsatz der musikalischen Komposition* (1853-54), “Despite its down-to-earth, pedagogical nature,” as “an ‘abstract’ work when viewed in the context of nineteenth-century compositional practice.” *Viennese Harmonic Theory*, 28 and 85. Karl Mayrberger may have been an exception. Citing Mayrberger’s analyses of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, Bernstein writes that Mayrberger was “Keenly aware of the radical developments in harmonic language taking place in the nineteenth century,” and that he “attempted to adapt Sechterian fundamental-bass theory to contemporary practice.” See “Nineteenth-Century Harmonic Theory,” 2.


intended for the introduction to Stein’s abridged edition, Schoenberg referred to his many tangents as nothing less than confessions: “There was so much which I had not yet said, so much which I had not yet confessed, so much which I had to do—and it became longer and longer: 470 pages (vielseitig! vielseitig!).”

The tone of Schoenberg’s statement is one of compulsion and liberation. Schoenberg found in his *Harmonielehre* an opportunity to make a deeply personal statement and a forum in which to confront what he felt to be injustices and inaccuracies in contemporary musical thought.

Pages of counterargument, aesthetic diatribe, and justification of his own advanced compositional method spill out in an almost stream-of-consciousness manner that reflects a very real discord toward “some old prejudices of musical aesthetics” and the complacency of theorists to accept the ideas of the past without question: “But I must say, it is mostly to bad books and wrong ideas, which forced me to think and find out what is right, that I owe the best of this book.”

More than instruction in craftsmanship, Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre* is an essay in the reevaluation of tonality in particular and musical inquiry in general.

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Indeed, critic Alex Ross’s grisly characterization of Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre* as an “autopsy of a system which has ceased to function” is not an overly explicit exaggeration of its content or its tone. The treatise may explicate diatonic triads, inversions, chromaticism, and the like, but in its philosophizing, *Harmonielehre* avoids any appearance of contributing to what Schoenberg portrays as an immoderate, unreasoned, and thus artistically restrictive indoctrination of tonality by those who consider it “to be the ultimate, the definitive musical system.” It is in the first three chapters, conspicuously omitted from R. D. W. Adams’ translation, that Schoenberg identifies himself as a master craftsman, as one whose understanding of the art comes from both careful study of the literature and physically handling the materials of music, as opposed to the theorist, who seeks to establish laws despite his relative idleness. Here, Schoenberg seeks to expose as orthodoxy the theories of those who, because of their own creative impotence, would seek ownership of the art by deriving systematic and eternal laws (*ewigen Gesetze*) from outmoded practice and aesthetics. Such orthodoxy wrongs he who is productive, the artist himself. But perhaps more importantly, the unfounded authority of theorists and aestheticians shackles creative expression and artistic growth, “For no one guards his property more jealously than the one who knows that, strictly speaking, it does not belong to him.” In his attempt “to fortify his unnatural position,” the theorist conscripts aesthetic judgment which, in its subjectivity, only furthers Schoenberg’s antagonism toward the baseless ideology behind one singular, tonal musical system.

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25 Ross, *The Rest is Noise*, 59.


27 Ibid., 7. In his *Harmonielehre*, Schoenberg consistently refers to unnamed theorists, aestheticians, and pupils in the masculine. In order to maintain continuity with Schoenberg’s prose, I will similarly use masculine pronouns throughout this study.

28 Ibid., 8.
The purpose behind such rhetoric is to identify an opponent to the potentials of untethered creative expression. For, if Schoenberg is to champion the expressive freedom of the artist, he must establish an antagonist to the eternal truths of art. I contend that it is this same theme of creative liberation in which John Adams situates his Harmonielehre for Orchestra, and fuller consideration of Schoenberg’s document will provide a useful background for establishing the ways in which Adams likewise intended his composition as a statement of expressive independence. Having redefined the tonal theory as tyrannical and ungrounded doctrine, Schoenberg proceeds to re-present the tonal, triadic-diatonic model as merely one possibility of shaping musical material. Taking the single tone as his point of departure, Schoenberg guides his readers through a nuanced teaching of harmony: one of “guidelines,” not rules, of “instructions,” not restrictions, and of “allowances,” not exceptions. As many had before him, Schoenberg centers his logical explanation of tonality in the harmonic series. Where he departs from his predecessors is in offering departures from the “natural model” not as artistic manipulations of the material, but as inconsistencies of a hyper-cultivated and static cultural product crumbling under the weight of its own overdevelopment.

As a statement for the creative agency of the artist, Schoenberg’s Harmonielehre is intended largely to instill within his readers an empathy for artistic innovation, an effort centered in a radical reconceptualization of dissonance directed at core principles of the tonal model. Beginning with the earliest counterpoint, a guiding logic of pitch organization in Western music is that points of reconciliation between voices moving in contrary motion and time are also points of greater consonance. By blurring the distinction between consonance and dissonance, and by offering phenomenological explanations for a dissonance sanctioned by nature, Schoenberg targets fundamental presumptions of Western musical practice and philosophy,
namely that dissonance must resolve, in an attempt to reconsider the materials of music in a new light unadulterated by the influence of tradition. If such a reconsideration of the musical materials establishes a profound counterpoint to the musical past, then the new expressive possibilities arising from Schoenberg’s “will to annihilate” would also arise from the artist’s search inward.  

Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre* represents a reinvestment into an artist’s capacity to create from the necessity of his own ear, from his own inner compulsions and impressions, and to explore the inherent possibilities within sound substance free from the expectations of culture.

**I. Aesthetics of Beauty and the Inadequacies of System**

The *Harmonielehre* of Schoenberg is an essay against absolutism. Beauty is not an absolute, nor is it a valid criterion by which to evaluate a musical passage. And Schoenberg provides examples of complicated, perhaps even “ugly,” harmonic passages from such “great masters” as J. S. Bach and Mozart to prove as much. The “laws” of music are not absolute, but merely products of taste; Schoenberg reminds his readers that parallel fifths and octaves, “forbidden” in contemporary practice, were at one time “in accord with the nature of sound and with the nature of man.” Nor is there an absolute distinction between consonance and dissonance, and by challenging the hierarchical relationship that presupposes a dissonance that is subordinate to consonance, Schoenberg undermines central tenants of the cultivated tradition. By this reasoning, Schoenberg attempts to demonstrate in his *Harmonielehre* that no musical system

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29 Ibid., 409.

30 Ibid., 324-25.

31 Ibid., 67-71.
is absolute, and specifically, that “tonality is no natural law of music.” As I show below, Schoenberg enters an established discourse in which properties derived from the musical literature were shown to arise from a natural sound phenomenon known as the harmonic series.

Where Schoenberg differs from his predecessors is in his belief that tonality is not the only musical language sanctioned by the “natural prototype.” Instead, Schoenberg contends, the tonal model is merely “common usage,” its so-called “laws” simply the conventions of compositional practice as handed down through the study and imitation of the masterworks.

Schoenberg found defenders of the “old harmonic system” to be exclusive and authoritarian, and he recalls his own struggles against an environment of antagonistic and repressive aestheticism:

Dare to feel otherwise [that tonality is no natural law], young artist, and you will have them all against you, those who claim that I am merely saying what everybody knows. And they will call you ‘New-Junker-Unkraut’ and ‘charlatan’ and will slander you: ‘You fake! You thought you could put something over on us!’ And when they have finished smearing you with their vulgarity, they will pose as those courageous men who would have thought it cowardly not to risk something on behalf of their views – something, that is, which only hurts the other.

Seemingly reacting against the type of personal attacks he faced as a young composer, Schoenberg opens the treatise with an invective against theorists whose teachings and judgments rest on, at worst, notions of beauty, and at best, the presumption that the laws of music, reassessed by Schoenberg as simply the “common characteristics” exhibited in the literature of

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32 Ibid., 9.
33 Ibid., 11; emphasis in original.
34 Ibid., 309.
35 Ibid., 9; brackets mine.
36 See, for example, the various criticisms collected by Nicolas Slonimsky in the Lexicon of Musical Invective: Critical Assaults on Composers since Beethoven’s Time (New York: Coleman-Ross Company, Inc., 1953), 148-153.
the past, “must then surely hold for all future phenomena as well.”37 In contrast to the critics of new music, Schoenberg champions the expressive freedom of the artist, no matter what type of musical language he employs. Dedicating his Harmonielehre “To the Hallowed Memory of Gustav Mahler,” and praising such contemporary “masters” as Mahler and Richard Strauss, he qualifies his polemic against the tonal system as a refutation of “the belief in the necessity of tonality, but not the belief in the power of a work of art whose author believes in tonality.”38 Put simply, Schoenberg’s objective in the Harmonielehre is not to dismiss tonality, but to show that it is not the absolute musical system. Compositional technique is merely the means by which a composer communicates “Something Other,” a concept he would later come to address as the “Musical Idea.”39 Just as Schoenberg rebelled against that which would dictate his manner of personal expression, he maintained that musical works should be judged not on the merit of their conformity to a pre-defined compositional system, but rather on the merit of their content.

Moreover, Schoenberg’s Romantic artistic ideals would have been adverse to any systemization of music to a given set of principles. Italian maestro Ferruccio Busoni, a correspondent of Schoenberg who premiered, performed, or provided feedback for such works as the Drei Klavierstücke, Op. 11, shared Schoenberg’s distaste for such rules.40 In his 1907 Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music, Busoni speaks of music as an art whose material defies rational law:

37 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 8.

38 Ibid., 396.


40 The correspondence between Busoni and Schoenberg touches on a variety of facets related not just to the practicalities of performance and publication, but also to the objectives of art, the intuitive, emotional creative impulses of the artist, and the relationship between composer and audience. See Ferruccio Busoni: Selected Letters, trans. and ed. Antony Beaumont (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 381-423.
We have formulated rules, stated principles, laid down laws; —we apply laws made for maturity to a child that knows nothing of responsibility!

Young as it is, this child, we already recognize that it possesses one radiant attribute which signalizes it beyond all its elder sisters. And the lawgivers will not see this marvelous attribute, lest their laws should be thrown to the winds. This child—it floats on air! It touches not the earth with its feet. It knows no law of gravitation. It is wellnigh incorporeal. Its material is transparent. It is sonorous air. It is almost Nature herself. It is—free. 41

Busoni’s passage is pregnant with Romantic aestheticism. To speak of music as still in the early stages of its development, its materials still relatively unexplored and malleable to new methods of expression, distinguishes it from the “old and mature arts” 42 such as sculpture, architecture, poetry, and painting, for which the artist draws upon thousands of years of artifacts and tradition to guide his hand. But also, Busoni’s characterization of music as a child, free of rules that might restrain expression, is echoed in his appeal to a music whose nature defies rational law. Recalling an age of reason which sought explanations for art in natural laws—for instance, Rameau’s conclusions that the origins of the fundamental bass lie in the existence of the corps sonore—Busoni offers an alternative. As unseen sound substance, music is “incorporeal,” spiritual, even unearthly. Its properties resist natural laws, gravity for instance, to which physical material is subject. Likewise, music resists cultural labels of “absolute” and “programmatic” music, central aesthetic issues of the day, and Busoni insists that music, as “transparent,” spiritual substance, occupies instead an abstract and poetic space independent of either designation. Nature, which exists beyond the boundaries and laws of civilization, provides for the Romantic artist a symbol of expression uninhibited by the influences and codified laws of a cultivated practice. Unbound to the realm of physical substance, music exemplifies the creative freedom for which the Romantic artistic spirit strives.


42 Ibid., 3.
We can credit Schoenberg as teacher for his reluctance to progress the student too quickly beyond the received tradition, despite his knowledge of and identification with Busoni’s *Sketch*.\(^{43}\) Schoenberg values above all else the composer’s instinctual dictates of the ear. Still, it is important to acknowledge that Schoenberg considered his *Harmonielehre* as *prefatory* to instruction in composition,\(^{44}\) and as mediator between the student and the harmonic resources, Schoenberg acknowledges a certain value to learning the traditional handicraft that lies beyond merely correctly using the material: “Dimly, each of us feels that, should we leave the novice to the discretion of his ear, he would write things that would of course not be necessarily wrong . . . but at the same time would not be necessarily right.”\(^{45}\) Schoenberg is concerned less with teaching compositional prescriptions than he is in cultivating what he refers to repeatedly in the text as the student’s “sense of form” (*Formgefühl*). This is not to speak of tonic and dominant, of A theme and B theme, nor of the pre-defined binary and da capo models. The *Formgefühl* is seemingly less tangible than the concept of *Gestalt*, a pattern or organization of melodic themes and motives. Rather, one of Schoenberg’s objectives in writing a treatise on traditional harmonic means is to cultivate the pupil’s inherent sense of order and rightness. As a highly coherent musical syntax, tonality provides a useful starting place. To begin and end on tonic has a certain rightness, as does the resolution of denser harmonic sonorities to simpler, more consonant structures. By learning the fundamentals of harmonic treatment, the student has a greater capacity to study and engage the masterworks of the past, not for the purpose of mere imitation,

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\(^{43}\) In August 1909, Busoni sent Schoenberg a copy of his *Sketch*, which Schoenberg cites in his *Harmonielehre* on more than one occasion. See *Ferruccio Busoni: Selected Letters*, 390-91.


\(^{45}\) Ibid., 93.
but to attain this elusive “sense of form,” the ability to create a logical realization of the Musical Idea.

Nevertheless, Schoenberg, like Busoni, is concerned for the place of music within a culture which weighs it down through excessive systemization. From Schoenberg’s text, we might best surmise his use of the word “systems” to denote collections of “rules” or “laws” drawn from careful observation of the musical literature. Such a procedure is not in itself bad, and Schoenberg speaks at times of such theorists as Riemann and Schenker with respect and admiration toward their accomplishments. However, musical systems which seek ever “sharper and stricter formulation of the rules” are conditioned precisely on cultural precepts, and thus forsake Busoni’s Romantic-idealistic account of the boundless nature of musical material. Systems tend to assert themselves over “the living example,” the music itself, and thus transform common technical features of the literature into prescriptions, into superficial school exercises. Moreover, systems are constructed from the works of the past, and thus are inherently hierarchical. Whether theorists consciously and viciously attack new music—and Schoenberg indeed confronts the polemic with which Schenker prefaces his Kontrapunkt (1910)—or whether their system merely relies on what Schoenberg considers to be past aesthetic assumptions, such as the assumption of an antithetical relationship between consonance and dissonance, systems favor past aesthetic values over the musical priorities of the present and future.

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46 Ibid., 409.

47 See note 23 above.

48 Schoenberg indeed considers the antithetical distinction between consonance and dissonance to be an issue of aesthetics, one of hierarchical presumption, for he criticizes systems which characterize dissonance as dependent on or complementary to consonance. See especially Theory of Harmony, 409.
Such systemization produces a static musical environment that is antagonistic toward new music, an environment which favors dutiful adherence to cultural precepts and diminishes the artist’s authority over his material. For instance, Schoenberg’s problem with the theory of non-harmonic tones (*harmoniefremde Töne*) is its hierarchical aesthetic implications:

The expression, ‘non-harmonic’ tones, I can interpret only to mean that a number of tones are declared unsuitable, or under certain conditions unsuitable, for forming harmonies; that such tones, because they intrinsically lack the ability to form harmonies, i.e. chords (*Zusammenklänge*), are designated as having nothing to do with music and consequently are thrown out of the art and out of its theory.  

To Schoenberg, the classification “non-harmonic tone” is both disparaging and inaccurate, for it assumes that a sonority resulting from the presence of a non-harmonic tone is not a chord, or is at best an “incidental” (zufällig) harmony. Either conception is presumably troubling for Schoenberg because each relegates the resultant sonority to that of secondary importance. Arguing the contrary, he defines the chord as *any* constitution of at least three tones, “hence, also of four, five, six, etc.” Thus, the harmonic construct resulting from, for instance, a passing or neighbor tone upon a harmony *is itself* a harmony, and its artistic effect is intentional. The labels “incidental” and “accidental” harmonies imply a chance relationship between harmony and melody which, at best, supports a conception of dissonance as a type of decadent ornamentation—the type of treatment he berates as “cheap stucco” (see above)—and, at worst, 

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49 Ibid., 309. To clarify between Schoenberg’s use of the terms “dissonance” and “non-harmonic tone,” he discusses the latter with regard to its interplay with a standard harmony, for instance, the triad. Schoenberg argues that non-harmonic tones should not be categorized apart from the chord as passing tones, suspensions, etc.; rather, the resultant sonority is itself a chord, a harmony. And he bases his claim in the naturally occurring harmonic series, which itself contains many more tones than triad. 

50 In the traditional instruction, chordal dissonances such as the dominant seventh, which strengthens the harmonic progression, were considered “essential” dissonances because of their influence on the progression. See Carl Dahlhaus, “Schoenberg and Schenker,” *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 100 (1973-1974): 209. 

51 Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, 311. The ninth chord is an example of the ways in which Schoenberg’s conception of harmony as *any* constitution of tones differs from that of Heinrich Schenker’s. Comprised of five tones, the ninth chord is rationalized in Schenker’s *Harmonielehre* of 1906 as a passing phenomena, thus an “incidental” construct (though Schenker does not use this expression). *Harmony*, 197-200.
marginalizes the authority of the craftsman over his material. Schoenberg’s revised descriptive classifications, “unessential” (unwesentlichen) and “uninfluential” (einflußlosen) harmonic structures, are intended to stress that, in the hands of the skilled craftsman, their artistic effect is indeed carefully fashioned, even if they have only marginal influence on the chord-to-chord progression of the root. And in the hands of such masters as J. S. Bach, where it is unlikely that “anything will happen that exerts absolutely no influence anywhere in the organism,” the treatment of dissonance can indeed take on logical, harmonic-structural influence.

The implicit argument within such deliberation is that a consideration of the resultant harmony as “incidental” discounts the position of composer as arbitrator and fashioner of musical substance. To identify passing tones, appoggiaturas, and the like, as non-harmonic tones is to neglect the artistic effect of their subsequent sonorities, to value the convention of functional triadic progression over a composer’s artistic sensibilities, and to promote totalitarian systemization over individualism. In his third edition, published in 1922, Schoenberg alluded to and denied claims that his Harmonielehre of the previous decade was a “great defense of modern music.” Still, it is difficult not to read his treatise as an extensive apologia. By the time he began writing the Harmonielehre, he had already completed at least three compositions which employ non-tertian sonorities and free use of dissonance—the Drei Klavierstücke, Op. 11, Erwartung, Op. 17, and Fünf Orchesterstücke, Op. 16 (all 1909). Carl Dahlhaus insists that we cannot dissociate Schoenberg’s compositional activities from our understanding of his treatise:


53 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 311. Schoenberg’s appeal to organic and evolutionary thought in discussing the attributes of a composition has been well documented and needs no further comment. For an example of the ways in a non-harmonic tone can take on structural significance, see Schoenberg’s discussion of Bach’s chorale, “Was mein Gott will, das g’scheh allzeit,” from the St. Matthew’s Passion, pp. 342-44.

54 Ibid., 408. Schoenberg continues, “I am not really unhappy about that, but I have to deny it, because it is not true. For modern music has greater need for performance than for defense.”
“when he speaks of the non-chordal notes of traditional theory he is also referring to the emancipated dissonance of his own atonal compositional practice—otherwise the emphasis of his argument is inexplicable.” As Dahlhaus alludes, in *Harmonielehre*, we find in Schoenberg’s explication of degrees of consonance the early intimations for what would become his oft-cited political metaphor, the emancipation of dissonance, the view that dissonance, in Schoenberg’s words, “came to be placed on an equal footing with the sounds regarded as consonances.” In practical terms, such rhetoric validated the emancipated compositions of Schoenberg and his followers and, likewise, “placed” them “on an equal footing” with the music of the past.

The paradox that Schoenberg’s advanced aesthetic interests would be paired with instruction in increasingly systemized harmonic resources accounts for the intricately nuanced character of Schoenberg’s prose. As demonstrated in his reconceptualization of “incidental” harmonies, redefined as “uninfluential” harmonies, such nuance levels the aesthetic playing field between existing and emerging musical models. To author a treatise on the fundamentals of harmony meant writing to a potentially vast audience, many individuals of which might be novices whose musical partialities would be malleable to a certain manner of persuasive writing. It is thus through his intricate and conscientious consideration of diction that Schoenberg attempts cultivate in his readers a liberal attitude toward harmonic techniques which defy cultural expectations.

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55 Dahlhaus, “Schoenberg and Schenker,” 213. Similarly, it is the position of Ethan Haimo that Schoenberg’s remarks concerning consonance and dissonance “seem suspiciously like ex post facto justifications, appeals to history and the laws of nature to justify a musical transformation that had already taken place.” “Schoenberg and the Origins of Atonality,” in *Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schoenberg and the Transformations of Twentieth-Century Culture*, ed. by Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 73. Roy C. Carter similarly comments that *Harmonielehre* “recorded the premises and the reasoning that were expressed musically in his ‘atonal’ and twelve-tone works.” Preface to Schoenberg *Theory of Harmony*, xix.

For example, contemporary readers may find it contradictory that in a treatise set so defiantly against “eternal laws,” Schoenberg would offer plenty of his own instructional “directions” (Anweisungen) and “guidelines” (Richtlinien). Given the purpose of the treatise, which is to instruct in the fundamentals of harmonic practice, such language, critics have recognized, is perhaps obligatory. However, Schoenberg’s nuanced expressions imply a type of instruction intended to cultivate in the student something beyond the ability to pass a school exam; it should cultivate in the musical-novice an ability both to critically assess and to effectively exploit the harmonic resources:

[U]ntil the pupil’s ear becomes a dependable guide, making it possible for him to judge new things independently, he will do well to abide by these instructions. For the possibilities they present will almost always turn out well. . . . And I think this should indeed be the objective of a course: to show the learner that which is without doubt good . . . and at the same time to open up for him a view of that which, once he has attained maturity (Kultur), he can create through his own inventiveness (Kombination).

In the first chapter of Harmonielehre, distinctively titled “Theorie oder Darstellungssystem?”, Schoenberg purports to present harmony not as a system of absolute laws, but rather in the same manner in which a single, learned artisan passes on his knowledge and experience handling the materials of his craft to an apprentice. Schoenberg finds value in approaching his instructional responsibilities from an historical, if traditional perspective, because the works of the past provide a useful, tried-and-true model for dealing with the material substance of music. The musical past demonstrates not rules, but guidelines for the treatment of the material, “the fulfillment of which is requisite to every good handicraft.” For example, in early vocal performance, instructions regarding the preparation and resolution of dissonance were necessary,

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58 Schoenberg, Theory or Harmonielehre, 121.

59 Ibid., 63; emphasis in original.
Schoenberg supposes, because these points of consonance provided a stable harmonic guidepost and, thus, the artistic means by which vocalists could sing the dissonances in tune. The composers of the past understood the requisites of their material and handled it accordingly. Such a hypothesis implicitly questions the necessity of preparation and resolution in an age in which instrumental music has surpassed vocal music, so long as instruments have the capacity to sustain correct intonation within dissonant settings. However conspicuous, Schoenberg’s efforts to speak of “guidelines” and “directions,” rather than “prohibitions” and “commandments” demonstrates his commitment to detailing certain possibilities of handling the harmonic resources, rather than reinforcing the laws of system.

Similarly, a contradiction exists in Schoenberg’s many efforts to demonize aesthetic explanations for certain established rules of harmonic treatment. To be sure, Schoenberg is guilty of making plenty of his own aesthetic judgments, particularly when it comes to an uneconomical use of artistic means. The composer should avoid the “unpleasant repetitions” of triads in root position. Inversions ensure a more melodic treatment of the bass, and they provide the composer a certain “workmanlike economy” when he exploits the different strengths and harmonic shades inherent in the various structural expressions of a single chord. It is not unreasonable to infer that Schoenberg’s appeal to artistic thrift is a calculated effort to temper the many aesthetic statements of his text. His explanation for the aversion to parallel fifths and octaves displayed in the masterworks clearly links “bad” linear part writing, an aesthetic judgment, to that which is uneconomical: “Thus, if in a thin harmonic texture the aim is to go

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60 Schoenberg does not comment on another essential function of consonance in early vocal polyphony, which was similarly to serve as a guidepost for handling its rhythmic complexities.

61 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 89.

62 Ibid., 55.
from $d$ to $e$, and one voice is enough to accomplish it, then – *if going from $d$ to $e$ was in fact and exclusively the aim* – it is *superfluous, that is, bad*, if another voice also goes from $d$ to $e$.”

Schoenberg spends considerable time and effort throughout his prose countering oversimplistic aesthetic explanations for harmonic phenomena. It is not enough, Schoenberg insists, for the instructor to teach that parallel fifths sound bad in contrapuntal writing. And while Dahlhaus has contended that Schoenberg’s continued appeal to artistic economy is itself an aesthetic argument reflecting his distaste for embellishment, Schoenberg’s logic reaffirms the composer’s responsibility to the requisites of the material and not to the dictates of culture.

Schoenberg’s emphasis on “the struggle of the craftsman to shape the material correctly” is intended, thus, to reestablish the authority of the artist, he who produces, above that of the aesthetician in manners concerning art. Dahlhaus explains that Schoenberg’s prose was indeed directed at a print culture increasingly antagonistic toward music that was unfamiliar or “difficult”:

The esthetics that Schoenberg dismissed with a scornful gesture as superfluous chatter was a metaphysics of the ‘beautiful in music,’ misused in journalism to defend an established situation. In the name of this esthetics, guardians of decayed traditions protested against the new music that they did not understand, music that they wanted to shut out of their range of hearing. On the other hand, the craft that Schoenberg contrasted with outworn esthetics meant to him precisely a central core of practices remaining within the bounds of tonality, the very language that Schoenberg had left behind as dead and finished, while traditional esthetics saw in tonality a precondition, given by nature or sanctioned by nature, of all intelligible musical expression.

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63 Ibid., 64; emphasis in original.

64 Nor is Schoenberg satisfied by Schenker’s “exaggeration” that parallel fifths and octaves diminish the independence of the voices, for Schonberg insists, voices retain independence through tone color.


Schoenberg acknowledges the tremendous sense of order attainable through tonal means, but he disagrees with the aesthetic presumption that other syntactical operations cannot produce a work of logic and coherence. The key centers and mostly tertian harmonies of tonal music had so conditioned listeners (or better, aestheticians), Schoenberg writes, that tonality was perceived to be the only syntax through which the ear could perceive order—beauty. Whether or not his ideas demanded a tonal artistic setting, the artist was obligated to compromise the purity of his musical ideas to fit its established and familiar syntax. In order to demonstrate further possibilities, and, indeed, to justify his own advanced compositional approach, Schoenberg challenges the logic that tonality is the only musical language “sanctioned by nature,” and he insists that a reexamination of the natural properties of sound will lead to further syntactical operations.

Insisting that the relationship between tonality and nature must be reassessed, Schoenberg professes to guide the student through the harmonic resources not merely as they have been treated in practice, but as inquiry into the natural phenomena of sound. His appeal to material and workmanship serves as the backdrop for an in-depth examination of the relationship between tonality and natural properties of a tone. These properties include a series of pitches emanating from and above any sounding pitch known as the harmonic series (der Naturklang). The tone, thus, holds within itself a harmonic model from which tonality can be shown to arise, but against which it also exhibits a number of inconsistencies. Schoenberg’s presentation of the harmonic resources and their tonal treatment is thus an anti-thesis. His step-by-step presentation of harmony underscores the inconsistencies of the tonal system with the harmonic series in order to demonstrate both tonality’s artificial supremacy and the possibility of alternative models of handling sound substance.
II. Schoenberg’s Appeal to Nature

Schoenberg’s emphasis on the artificiality of the minor mode is a central point of discussion in his attempt to point out the fallibility of the tonal system. Schoenberg, like many theorists before him, viewed the major triad as an imitation of the first five tones of the harmonic series (i.e., $C_1$, $C_2$, $G_2$, $C_3$, $E_3$). He was more skeptical of the Riemannian deduction that “we can accept…the inversion of the idea of the triad and the undertones as an explanation of the minor triads.”

Contrary to Riemann’s speculations, Schoenberg comments that “The prototype of the first overtones explains, at most, the major triad, but nothing else,” and more directly, “The minor mode is purely synthetic, a product of art, and attempts [by others] to represent it as something given in nature are pointless.” On this point, Schoenberg agrees with Heinrich Schenker, who writes, “The explanation [of minor] becomes easier if artistic intention rather than Nature herself is credited with the origin of the minor mode.”

Both Schoenberg and his rival viewed the minor mode as a cultural refinement of natural sound materials, despite its appearance in the upper partials of the overtone row. But, for Schoenberg, the minor triad, as well as other “composite sounds” (Zusammenklänge) such as the augmented and diminished triads, is a marker of a cultivated idiom, distant from nature, with which the true artist should not be content.

Schoenberg’s view of the harmonic series as an explanation for the major triad is not unique. For centuries, theorists had examined natural intervallic properties through musical-
scientific devices such as the monochord. But it is in the writings of Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) that the harmonic series began to serve as a rational basis for tonality rooted in natural acoustic phenomena. Rameau’s *Nouveau système de musique théorique* (1726) drew upon the findings of the empiricists Joseph Sauveur and Marin Mersenne in order to explain through their newly documented observations of acoustical properties his theory of the fundamental bass, which he first proposed in the influential *Traité de l’harmonie* (1722). Having previously justified his concept of the fundamental bass as a product of taste and musical refinement, Rameau heralded the harmonic series as a long-awaited marriage between reason and musical phenomena, writing, “I propose that for lack of having known the fundamental bass, reason and the ear have heretofore not been accorded in music.”\(^{72}\) Rameau’s theory provides a natural explanation for the development of musical practice that theorists, including Schoenberg, have consistently relied upon. Henry Klumpenhouwer remarks that “Almost all tonal theorists have proposed that triadic structure arises from a fundamental, conceptually anterior, constituent pitch…that exerts unity on the collection by means of an array of intervallic relationships sanctioned by Nature (through, say, various properties of string vibrations or harmonic overtones).”\(^{73}\) And the notion remains present in the writings of some of musicology’s most esteemed contemporary voices.\(^{74}\)


\(^{74}\) For example, Charles Rosen describes tonality as “a hierarchical arrangement of the triads based on the natural harmonics or overtones of a note.” *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven*, expanded edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 23.
However, whereas Rameau happily embraces the logic of the harmonic series as an explanation for characteristics of the cultivated musical tradition, Schoenberg pounces on tonality’s compromised relationship with “natural prototype” as a means by which to discredit its presumed authority as a permanent and preeminent musical system.\(^{75}\) Schoenberg was not merely seeking an explanation for tonality in nature, Antonio Serravezza writes. “In reality he intends to assert something more, namely that the nature of the material is not merely a condition but is also a guide and model of artistic activity.”\(^{76}\) Though tonality can be shown to arise from nature, it sacrifices much to art, and it is worth considering approaches to shaping musical material that may emulate the natural sound properties of the tone more closely. After the minor mode, another key contradiction, Schoenberg insists, is the equal-tempered chromatic scale. In equal temperament, natural tunings are manipulated to produce twelve equidistant semitones, allowing composers to exploit the full gambit of the twelve major and minor keys. Without these adjustments, the natural acoustics create problems in intonation which prevent all keys from sounding agreeably. Schoenberg considers equal temperament an “ingenious simplification” of the problems associated with natural tunings; however, while he acknowledges that equal temperament makes sound substance more manageable, and that by this ability the tempered scale profoundly impacted the development of music into a “marvelous system” of “logic and coherence,” he also characterizes it as a “makeshift” solution, a compromise that had far exceeded its potential.\(^{77}\) His writing condemns the modifications of the harmonic series as a


\(^{77}\) Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, 313-14, and 93.
“truce which should not last any longer than the imperfection of our instruments requires.” 78 Consequently, equal temperament shares with the minor triad an inconsistency with the harmonic series. And for Schoenberg, both represent a step away from the pure imitation of nature toward artifice.

Although Rameau likewise has difficulty reconciling the minor triad and temperament with his new-found natural basis for the fundamental bass, he and Schoenberg depart radically in their interpretations of the relationship between nature and dissonance. Unlike Schoenberg, Rameau does not subscribe to the notion that the upper partials of the harmonic series influence the perception of a sounding tone—that one could perceive the inherent dissonance of the tone. Dissonance in musical practice, like the minor mode, is thus best explained as the product of musical refinement, the practice of stacking thirds (the chordal seventh, ninth, etc.): “If the dissonance in the resonance of a sonorous body is not heard, this proves that it is not natural in harmony; and, consequently, it cannot be introduced there except with the help of art.” 79 Referring to compositional technique (“the help of art”) as a means by which to negotiate carefully the integration of dissonance into a musical setting, Rameau prefigures Schoenberg’s emphatic retort of the harmonic-theoretical tradition: “Harmony, its theory, its pedagogy, is concerned with non-harmonic tones!” 80 Schoenberg considers it ironic and misguiding that teachings about harmony consistently include substantial commentary about dealing with tones that are supposedly foreign to triadic harmony. “Either there is no such thing as non-harmonic tones, or they are not non-harmonic,” he quips. 81

78 Ibid., 313-314.
79 “Rameau’s Nouveau système,” 162 and 310.
80 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 309; emphasis in original.
81 Ibid., Theory of Harmony, 309.
In contrast to Rameau’s artificial characterization of dissonance, Schoenberg views dissonance as a natural and implicit feature of a fundamental tone. He writes, “there appear [in the overtone series] after some stronger-sounding overtones a number of weaker-sounding ones,” if perceptible to the listener only through tone color. It is in this natural explanation of dissonance that Schoenberg rationalizes his famous dictum, the emancipation of dissonance, though the expression does not appear in the Harmonielehre. If dissonance, like consonance, is sanctioned by nature, then dissonance is a material equally substantive and suitable for the musical craftsman’s hand. It is unnatural, Schoenberg implies, that a dissonance which exists freely in nature should in art be subject to consonance.

It is thus in Schoenberg’s reconsideration of the terms “consonance” and “dissonance” that he most aggressively challenges the presumptions of the musical past. Though he presents the treatment of dissonance conventionally—designating as consonant only the octave, perfect fifth and fourth, and thirds and sixths—he digresses into a philosophical reinterpretation of the consonant-dissonant conflict that had been so fundamental to the language of music before the twentieth century. Namely, he challenges the dichotomy of consonance and dissonance, with its implications of harmony and discord, alleging that the point at which the ear perceives an interval agreeable or discordant is not finite. “They are no more opposites than two and ten are opposites,” Schoenberg writes. “[T]he expressions ‘consonance’ and ‘dissonance’, which signify an antithesis, are false.”

Turning to the harmonic series, he indicates that the upper overtones

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82 Ibid., 20; brackets mine.

83 Schoenberg does use the phrase “emanzipierten Dissonanzen” once in the treatise in reference to the chordal seventh and ninth. See Harmonielehre (1922), 391; and Theory of Harmony (1978), trans. Carter, 323. Schoenberg infers that the current designation of the seventh chord as a harmony was undoubtedly previously contended. The chordal seventh as a dissonant tone had become emancipated because of the adoption of the seventh chord into the theory.

84 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 21.
(i.e. the chordal ninth, eleventh, etc.) are simply less perfect consonances than those closer to the fundamental tone. He thus designates them as “more remote consonances,” suggesting a musical conceptualization in which no tone is “dissonant.”

Schoenberg’s logic presents a profound counterpoint to a musical past which takes at its foundation the subordinate position of dissonance to consonance. Whether or not twentieth-century music substantiated his theory that the ear would grow accustomed to freer use of the “more remote consonances,” by distorting the hierarchical relationship of consonance and dissonance, Schoenberg subverted a fundamental tenant of musical rhetoric that reaches back to the earliest counterpoint: that points of rest and closure are more euphonious, more consonant, than developmental material. Writing of Boethius’ *De Institutione Musica* (ca. 500 C.E.), which was highly regarded in European educational circles and used at Oxford into the nineteenth century, David E. Cohen relates directly the doctrine of *consonance* central to the development of Western music:

The relationship between consonance and dissonance in [Boethius’s] *Musica* is structured as an unequal, hierarchized opposition, in which consonance holds the dominant position because of its virtual identification with the metaphysical ideal of unity. Conversely, dissonance ... represents the negative values of duality and difference, and hence discord, conflict, and disorder. Consequently, through various textual strategies, consonance is identified with "music" itself, while dissonance is effectively excluded from that domain.

Boethius’ early Christian intellectual view of music exhibits the seeds of a musical-conceptual framework from which sprouts the linear historical development of Western musical practice.

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85 Ibid., 21. For the purposes of instruction, Schoenberg concedes the terminology, but he argues that “dissonance” as a concept will soon be insufficient to describe musical practice.


through the nineteenth century. Consonance, because of its “unity,” its wholeness (*perfectio*), is substantive enough to exist on its own as musical material. Dissonance, because of its imperfection, subsists only in its submission to (its *resolution* to) consonance. The cultivation of the duality between consonance and dissonance creates a hierarchical syntactical arrangement which, at its simplest, governs the manner in which dissonance resolves to consonance in the earliest polyphony, and which through greater degrees of complexity demands in the tonal compositions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the harmonic resolution of a passage, movement, or composition, to the fundamental key in which it begins.\(^88\)

In the musical conceptions of Boethius and Rameau, the distinction between consonance and dissonance is finite. Boethius’ dualistic view of a perfect consonance versus an imperfect dissonance developed and sustained a tradition of music in which dissonance “occupies a secondary and inferior position, in that it can never stand by itself as something self-sufficient, but instead always requires some sort of *justification* for its presence at any given moment in the polyphonic texture.”\(^89\) This justification, Cohen explains, is centered in a “rule-governed connection” to the preparation and resolution of dissonance which “has been for centuries an integral and central part of the disciplined ‘art’ or ‘craft’ of music.”\(^90\) Thus, Schoenberg’s inheritance spans the breadth of a cultivated Western musical practice which takes as central the duality between consonance and dissonance from its earliest counterpoint. In the writings of Rameau, Schoenberg’s more immediate predecessor, this duality manifests itself as the

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\(^88\) As Rosen puts it, in common-practice tonality, motion away from tonic “must be conceived as essentially a dissonance raised to a higher plane, that of the total structure.” *Classical Style*, 26.


\(^90\) Cohen, “Metaphysics, Ideology, Discipline,” 2. Cohen uses the term “polyphony” to “denote tonal and/or pre-tonal polyphonic music.” And, significantly, he acknowledges that the hierarchized view of consonance and dissonance “is not longer strictly applicable to a great deal of twentieth-century music, and is therefore irrelevant to theories concerned therewith.”
interpretation of consonance as “natural,” dissonance as “artificial.” Rameau’s explanation is one in a line of logical progression reaching back to the early Christian view of music. An unnatural dissonance, meaning a dissonance that does not have within itself the property of self-sufficiency, remains dependent on and subordinate to consonance. Its justification falls to the responsibility of the craftsman, in accord with the “rules” as handed down through the literature.

Breaking from this conceptual line of musical philosophy, Schoenberg redefines the labels consonance and dissonance. A dissonance which, Schoenberg professes, is sanctioned by nature is substantive enough to exist in and of itself. And his conviction that degrees of dissonance—or better, degrees of consonance—are subjective allows for a broader interpretation of musical coherence and, implicitly, more inclusive consideration of compositions that skew conventional uses of dissonance. Why must dissonance continue to be “carefully packed” in the “protective wrappers” of preparation and resolution—which emphasizes a purity of consonance and an invasive, polluted dissonance—when the “harmonic taste of [the] ultramodernists” has “already come so far as to make no more distinction between consonances and dissonances[?]” Schoenberg asks implicitly. After all, the history of musical practice is simply a slow climb up the partials of the harmonic series (for example, “The seventh is a dissonance and thus belongs to those phenomena produced by the desire to bring into use the more remote overtones.”). Schoenberg’s reconceptualization of dissonance as natural, pre-existing substance, and his obfuscation of the consonance-dissonance binary that shaped the musical conceptual framework from the early Christian perspective through the nineteenth century, effectually undermined the

91 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 49.

92 Ibid., 70.

93 Ibid., 81. Schoenberg reasons that the use of dissonance “must have happened quite gradually; and the attempt to mingle the more remote overtones, the dissonances, with the consonances must have been undertaken at first just occasionally and with great caution.” p. 46.
fundamental syntactical premise and cornerstone of the Western musical tradition—that dissonance must resolve to consonance.

The Harmonielehre of Arnold Schoenberg may have been centered extensively in the tonal treatment of harmony, but it is far from a strict presentation of traditional harmonic practice. It is an investigation into the phenomena of sound and an attempt to reach a fuller understanding of the harmonic resources inherent in a single pitch. The effectiveness with which composers have handled sound material through the syntax and techniques that comprise tonal practice makes tonality a useful model for instructing the pupil to fashion musical substance in a way that conveys a sense of order and logic.

However, Schoenberg stops far short of anointing tonality as the only—or even the best—archetype for engaging sound material effectively. Instead, paradoxically, Schoenberg’s step-by-step presentation of tonality is also an explication of its inconsistencies with the natural properties of sound material. Schoenberg argues that tonality’s cultivation of harmonic practices that are foreign to nature—for instance, equal temperament, the minor mode, “vagrant” chords, and the distinction between consonance and dissonance—had derailed the exploration of yet undiscovered harmonic potentials which exist naturally in the material of sound. Through this appeal to humankind’s universal desire to understand the natural world, he argues implicitly that his own freely dissonant compositions resume inquiry into the Naturklang. In the musical conceptions of the past, dissonance was assumed to be complementary, even unnatural, and thus required special treatment within an otherwise consonant harmonic or intervallic framework. The natural properties of sound suggest otherwise, Schoenberg contends. If dissonance exists freely and naturally in the harmonic series of a sounding tone, then dissonance is an inherent feature of
the musical material and is subordinate not to the codified prescriptions of theory, but only to the demands of the composer’s musical imagination.
CHAPTER 3

Adams and the Challenge to Musical Modernism

Consciousness is one factor, and there is another factor equally important—that is, the unconscious—that can interfere with consciousness anytime it pleases.

--Carl Jung

In the summer of 1982, John Adams began work on a soundtrack for the documentary *Matter of Heart* which explored the life and theories of the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung. Haunted by an unquenchable urge to better understand the implications of his own vivid dreams, Jung spent his career attempting to reconcile conscious thought and the impulses of the unconscious. The film features a number of anecdotes which portray a stinging boorish Jung empirically badgering his friends and acquaintances in a restless search to make visible and explainable modes of unconscious thought that individuals suppress for the cause of social politeness. One interviewee speaks of Jung’s “intolerance of persona,” and recalls a social occasion that Jung manipulated in order to preclude its “polite persona level.” Seeking closer ties to innate human expression, Jung had little interest in maintaining the sense of propriety that culture instills in an individual.

Adams writes in his memoirs that he was deeply invested in the soundtrack. He read Jung’s writings, used some of his commission money to travel to Jung’s Switzerland retreat at Bollingen, and even subjected himself to over a year-and-a-half of therapy sessions with a Jungian psychoanalyst in San Francisco. Adams may not have been pleased with the artistic product of his efforts, calling his completed score one of “stunning mediocrity,” but the project

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clearly informed his artistic conception in the years leading up to *Harmonielehre*. Remnants of Adams’ score to *Matter of Heart* echo the vocalizations of *Grand Pianola Music (GPM)*, and fragments of the soundtrack pepper the harmonic language of *Harmonielehre*. Even before beginning to work on *Matter of Heart*, Adams had sought to become more trusting of his unconscious creative impulses. He describes his creative process for *GPM* as “a kind of trance of automatic recall, where almost any and every artifact from my musical subconscious was allowed to float to the surface and encouraged to bloom.”

The creative inspirations for both *GPM* and *Harmonielehre*, so Adams claims, was a series of dreams that included, respectively, dueling piano-like limousines, and a tanker blasting off like a rocket out of the San Francisco Bay. And during an interview with music critic Michael Stein that would appear in the program book for the San Francisco Symphony’s March 1985 premiere of *Harmonielehre*, Adams reportedly employed a “Jungian diagram illustrating head-heart polarity” in order demonstrate his observations that twentieth-century music had overemphasized rationality “at the expense of the feeling portion.”

Adams’ creative persona has remained embedded in German culture and philosophy since his work on *Matter of Heart* and *Harmonielehre*. Namely, he has continued to draw on what in all actuality became a wellspring of creative inspiration in the confrontational legacy of Arnold Schoenberg. Adams’ second opera, *The Death of Klinghoffer (1985-87)*, employs Schoenbergian *Sprechstimme* vocal techniques, and the *Chamber Symphony* (1992) draws on the same instrumentation and complex polyphony of Schoenberg’s *Kammersymphonie*, Op. 9 of 85 years earlier. In *Naïve and Sentimental Music* (1998), a work that for all purposes should be

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considered his Second Symphony (discounting the orchestral diptych *El Dorado* (1991))—and indeed, one that Adams considers with *Harmonielehre* as “part of a family of pieces”—Adams seemingly adopted the same type of creative impetus as he had in *Harmonielehre* by drawing on a German artistic-philosophical text, that of Friedrich Schiller’s *Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung* (1795-96).

A writer in the German literary tradition that sought to break from the influence of the dominating French literary and poetic models of the eighteenth-century, Schiller laments that few artists create from genuine, uninhibited impulse. He conveys his ideals of artistic expression through the analogy of the child that speaks out of turn, and perhaps more importantly, that speaks truth unwittingly and in spite of culture’s unspoken rules of civility:

> As freely and naturally as genius expresses itself in its works of the spirit, its innocence of heart is expressed in its social intercourse. Because we have fallen . . . far from simplicity and strict truth of expression in life in society . . . , our easily wounded guilt, as well as our easily seduced powers of imagination, have made a timid propriety necessary. Without being false, one often speaks otherwise than one thinks. . . . Ignorance of these conventional rules combined with natural sincerity that despises all deviousness and every trace of falsity . . . produces a naivety of expression in society that consists of calling things which one may mention either only in some artificial manner, or not at all, by their true names and in the most succinct fashion. Of this sort are the customary expressions of children. They arouse laughter by their contrast with the usages, but one must always confess in one’s heart that the child is right.

Schiller writes of a similar mode of expression that Jung “engineered” in social settings.

Whereas Jung sought to strip away pretenses of cultural decorum readily adopted by adults, Schiller’s essay depicts a chaste, childlike expression that has yet to be adulterated by the

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formalities of “fashionable society.”

But further, Schiller’s ideal of a naïve creative mode which follows its free, instinctual impulses prefigures the Romantic aestheticism that informs the writings of Busoni and Schoenberg (see Chapter 2 of this dissertation).

By composing *Naïve and Sentimental Music*, thereby introducing Schiller’s voice into the cultural milieu in which Adams situates his art, Adams has partially connected the dots between Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre* and its namesake. Both Jung and Schiller seek to explore subconscious, “natural” modes of expression untamed by the dictates of culture, a position which likewise informs Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre*. Hypothesizing about Wagner’s creative journey, Schoenberg evokes shades of the Schiller’s naïve genius:

Starting wholly from within the bounds of what everyone of his time understood music to be, his music follows at first the one necessity just to express himself somehow or other, with not the slightest concern for beauty and novelty or for style and art. But without his noticing it, traits that point toward his future development insinuate themselves. One time it is merely that he does not accomplish something that any musical craftsman would have done faultlessly. Here there are obstacles in the way which will cause his stream to find a new course. Another time it is something positive: an inspiration, some direct, unconscious, often brutal, sometimes almost *childish assertion of his own nature*. But the young artist does not know himself; he does not yet sense wherein he is different from the others, different above all from the literature. He still adheres generally to the precepts of his education and is not able to break through it everywhere in favor of his own inclinations.

Schoenberg speaks of Wagner’s “childish assertion of his own nature” to argue that Wagner did not intend to break from “the precepts of his education.” Rather, in Schoenberg’s view, Wagner’s departures from the musical past were unconscious manifestations of inner expression, inner substance. This reasoning in particular accesses Schiller’s definition of the naïve, in that the naïve artist, in contrast to the sentimental, is unaware of his departures from the past. Further, Schoenberg’s passage exhibits the Romantic ideal of *Nature* as a metaphor for expressive

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freedom, a metaphor illustrated aptly in Busoni’s *Sketch of New Music*. Whereas the cultivated tradition is viewed as law, its restrictions conveyed through imagery of the “bounds of what everyone…understood music to be” and the “obstacles” through which the artist must “break through,” Schoenberg speaks of Wagner’s naïve, free creative spirit through imagery of nature: the “stream” in search of “a new course.”

When Adams characterizes his compositional process of *GPM* as one of intuitive expression (as I have shown above), he implicitly nods to Schiller’s concept of a naïve mode of thought “led only by nature or by instinct.”¹¹ The connection becomes more explicit in Adams’ recollection of the work’s premiere, in which he depicts *GPM* as an insolent child within a parlor of patrons whose social posturing upholds a hierarchy of aesthetic conformity:

> When *Grand Pianola Music* was first performed in New York (in 1982 in a festival of contemporary music organized and conducted by the composer Jacob Druckman) the audience response included a substantial and (to me) shocking number of "boos." True, it was a very shaky performance, and the piece came at the end of a long concert of new works principally by serialist composers from the Columbia-Princeton school. In the context of this otherwise rather sober repertoire *Grand Pianola Music* must doubtless have seemed like a smirking truant with a dirty face, in need of a severe spanking.¹²

Whether or not Adams intentionally seeks to adopt the label of “ naïve,” his reaction of surprise to the chorus of boos following the performance of *GPM* bears similarities to Schoenberg’s depiction of a youthful Wagner unaware that “he is different from the others.” But perhaps it is more significant that Adams persistently characterizes the work as child-ish, a characteristic which, Schiller writes, “causes that smile by which we betray our *(theoretical)* superiority.”¹³

In the introduction to Part 1 of this dissertation, I argue that *GPM* serves as an antithesis to the indoctrinated austerity of post-war modernism. A reading of the work through the lens of

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Schiller and Jung similarly demonstrates its subversive relationship to the airs of serialism’s objective, quantitative formulae. What Adams has described as his intuitive approach to *GPM* highlights and contradicts the forced aesthetics of a zealously rational compositional process.

Adams’ musical misbehavior can hardly be said to rival Schoenberg’s radical break with the pervasive tonal system of his time, but we find in Adams’ infatuation with the instinctual mode of creative process a very clear departure from the objective, even mathematical approach of much modernist atonality. At the time that Adams wrote *GPM* and *Harmonielehre*, the environment for new music was one that devalued intuitive modes of expression in favor of rational justifications for the simple progression from one note to the next. Even as late as 1987, critics observed of new music that “the single intuitive choice between one note and another is presently considered suspect. . . . Heaven forbid a ‘professional’ composer should be caught explaining a particular passage as an expression of some instinctive, emotional, or—even worse—spiritual feeling.”

The extent to which any composition is “rational” or “intuitive” can be debated, especially when subjectivity is extended to elements other than pitch selection. For the sake of brevity in the current discussion, I use the terminology “intuitive” and “intuition” with regard specifically to the localized progression from one note to the next. Intuition in this capacity refers to the selection of the next note in accordance to what *sounds right* (Schoenberg’s *Formgefühl*), in contrast to “rational” or “precompositional” process.

The distrust of post-war attitudes toward the composer’s inner expressive world or creative instincts belies Schoenberg’s position as the harbinger of twentieth-century musical modernism. His *Harmonielehre* demands of its readers a greater sensitivity not only to the less perceptible properties of the “natural model,” but also to their own subconscious musical

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inclinations. As his discussion of Wagner reflects, Schoenberg reasons that the evolutionary developments of music take place on an intuitive level. His logic that the development of harmony has been nothing more than a slow climb up the harmonic series is reflected in his hypothesis regarding tone color that “The more remote overtones are recorded by the subconscious.”\(^{15}\) Schoenberg was aware that timbre of a sounding tone depends on which overtones appear in its natural constitution. As imperceptible sound substance, the overtones posses an intangible quality shared by the one’s inner anima. Thus, becoming more attuned to the more remote overtones seemingly implies a greater capacity to perceive, and to imagine, a wider body of harmonic resources and the possibilities of alternative musical systems including emancipated dissonances, quartal harmonies, and, should the “illusory stuff of our dreams” permit, Klangfarbenmelodie.\(^ {16}\)

In contrast, the post-war musical vanguard prioritized pre-determined process at the expense of Schoenberg’s “intensely organic subjectivity.”\(^ {17}\) As I demonstrate in the introduction to Part 1 of this study, the perception existed among a number of composers in the 1960s, ’70s, and early ’80s that attaining recognition from the aesthetic institutions often meant conforming to its hyper-rational tenants. Similarly, Cageian irrationality, despite its indeterminate operations, nonetheless remained retained a certain objective distance from the personal, inner experience of music. Minimalism emerged within this objective musical climate, and thus prioritizes a similar disconnect between the dictates of the ear and the process by which composers write the “next” tone. Elaine Broad groups minimalism with Cageian experimental music and serialism in that “all three share a certain pre-compositional intellectualism that seems

\(^{15}\) Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 21.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 422.

\(^{17}\) Susan McClary. See Chapter 2, note 1 above.
to be symptomatic of the ‘art music’ of this century.” “One can imagine some 22nd-century musicologist lumping them together as part of the same phenomenon,” muses Kyle Gann, “one that I currently call ‘the objectivist mindset.’”

When we consider Schoenberg’s faith in the impulsive creative spirit, as well as the many derisive comments toward aesthetics which paint his Harmonielehre, Adam’s decision to title his own Harmonielehre after the treatise becomes clearer. At the time of its composition, Adams’ intellectual world was steeped in Jungian philosophy, which centers on an attentiveness to the subconscious and a balance (harmonia) between conscious thought and unconscious impulses. And yet, Adams’ Harmonielehre represents more than a reinvestment into his own innate “sense of form” (Formgefühl); similar to Schoenberg’s text, the Harmonielehre of Adams exhibits a profound departure from the cultural preconditions of compositional activity. Having adopted minimalism as a compositional syntax, Adams proceeds to dissociate its musical features—minimalism is loosely characterized by its steady repetition and extremely gradual harmonic growth—from the presumptions of modernist activity in the same way that Schoenberg dissociates the act of composition from the cultural precondition of tonality.

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19 Gann, “Let X = X,” 147.

20 Indeed, drawing on an example from the visual arts, Adams uses precisely this language to explain own creative process. “I think that when you have your musical technique so thoroughly ingrained in your whole self . . . , you can trust your innate sense of balance. . . . I once saw a movie of Picasso drawing on a large paper, and he was up so close to the wall that he couldn’t possibly see what he was doing. And yet his intuitive sense of form and his innate sense of balance was so perfect that he never had to stand back to look at it. That’s the kind of control that a good artist should have.” Adams quoted in K. Robert Schwarz, “Process vs. Intuition in the Recent Works of Steve Reich and John Adams,” American Music 8, no. 3 (Autumn 1990), 260-61.
I. Textual Stratification, “Elegiac” Melodies, and Jazz Influences

It will be useful to begin this investigation with a musical example, which I present as Example 3.1. This oft-cited passage from Part I of John Adams’ *Harmonielehre* is characteristic of much of the manner in which the composition unfolds, and it aptly illustrates the “one-of-kind, once-only essay in the wedding of fin-de-siècle chromatic harmony with the rhythmic and formal procedures of Minimalism” that is the piece’s *raison d’être*. Adams adapts minimalist elements not for their own sake, but in the cause of a broader expressive musical palette. The architectural design runs deeper than classic minimalist structures by forging melodic-accompanimental relationships. Minimalist textures supply a foundation of steady pulsation and tonal stability which affords Adams a stable environment for a working out (*inventio*) of melodic ideas.

Example 3.1 is a reduction of one of the simplest textures of the entire symphony, and in its simplicity, it displays a clear interplay between two dissimilar musical conceptions. The voices which I have designated as Group B in the example are derived from an identifiably minimalist language. Flutes recirculate an arpeggiated E-flat minor triad in varying phase positions, creating a harmonically static, tonal harmonic plane which subsists unaltered through m. 287. Clarinets perform similarly but color the harmony by adding the chordal ninth $F$. Adams complicates the relative harmonic stability with the addition of the chordal major-seventh, $D_{\text{natural}}$—an infrequent sonority in functional and non-functional tonality alike—which appears in the harps and celesta. Still, the consistent and steady stream of eighth-notes within these instrumental groups, as well as the interwoven triplet figuration of Harp 2, contributes to the texture the distinctive steady pulse of minimalism.

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Example 3.1 – *Harmonielehre*, Part I (mm. 257-67; reduced score)
Example 3.1 (continued)
Example 3.1 (continued)
Example 3.1 (continued)
The remaining voices, depicted here as Group A, demonstrate features less characteristic of minimalism. The large brass chord extends the E-flat minor tonality through the chordal thirteenth C, which creates a sonority more typical of bebop and modal jazz or the harmonic palette of the late-Romantic era than the simplified, mostly triadic harmonic language of strict minimalism. And as the brass chord subsides, a melody emerges in Horn 1 and Cello performing in unison. While the appearance of a melody is relatively idiosyncratic with early minimalism, Adams complicates the minimalist texture further by placing the melody in two-part, non-imitative counterpoint against the Double Bass. Further, much like the Romantic-era harmonic color provided by the brass, the melody’s lyricism, its unprepared and prolonged non-harmonic tones, its lack of a strong antecedent-consequent periodicity, and its scoring in the extreme upper register of the celli convey an emotional intensity conspicuously reminiscent of some late Romantic-era melodies.

The peculiarity of the passage given as Example 3.1 is a characteristic of Adams’ early compositional period (roughly 1977-1990) about which few commentators have failed to remark. Most, following K. Robert Schwarz’s early appraisal of Adams’ compositional approach, regard this type of stylistic juxtaposition as a marker of his aesthetic (postmodernist) and generational (post-minimalist) identification. Jankowitz and Rörich seek a more ideological explanation. They regard Adams’ juxtaposition of minimalist and Romantic elements as a type of “double-

22 Adams credits his largely independent study of jazz for his harmonic conception: “I would slowly, laboriously inch through a recording of a tune by Miles Davis or Charlie Parker or John Coltrane, writing down the harmonies and then trying them out in different keys. I learned much more about tonal harmony from this activity than I’d learned by sitting in a classroom and doing written exercises from a textbook.” Hallelujah Junction, 105. Further, he admits that the harmonic colors of jazz inform the Harmonielehre: “I wrote chord changes which are quite similar to jazz music – like Miles Davis might do. I created the harmonic structure first, and then I went back and composed the melody to reflect he chord sequence.” Quoted in Müller-Berg, “Tonal harmony is like a natural force,” 222.

coding,” which they define as an intentional juxtaposition of diverse compositional aesthetics, the effect of which is parody of one or both of them.  

Specifically, the authors argue, Adams’ *Harmonielehre* performs as a parody of the supposed non-representational, systematic aesthetic of minimalism, an interpretation facilitated not only through Adams’ combination of minimalist techniques with their more potentially “meaningful” Romantic gestures, but also through his delegation of programmatic narrative onto specifically minimalist music: the depiction in the third movement of Adams’ infant daughter “perched on the shoulder of the Medieval mystic, Meister Eckhardt, as they hover among the heavenly bodies like figures painted on the high ceilings of old cathedrals.”

While I do subscribe to the term “double-coding” as it connotes irony in Adams’ self-identified “Trickster” compositions, such as *Grand Pianola Music* and *Chamber Symphony*, I find its use as a descriptor for the stylistic peculiarity of *Harmonielehre* imprecise. Namely, I do not believe that *Harmonielehre* invokes the same playful badgering that is the spirit of the Trickster pieces. The blatant vulgarities of *Grand Pianola Music*—its Lisztian arpeggations, its cooing sirens, its “echoes of marching-band music and an almost perverse diatonicism”—better reflect the spirit of “double-coding” created by and directed at a minimalism miscegenated by multiple and varied musical elements. And in *Chamber Symphony*, Schoenbergian motivic modules are mongrelled by the sounds of cartoon music. *Harmonielehre* does indeed reflect Adams’ dissatisfaction with compositional priorities of the previous generation, but I do not believe that this dissatisfaction is manifested in *Harmonielehre* as parody. Nevertheless,

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Jankowitz and Rörich are correct in identifying the significance of Adams’ departure from the aesthetic priorities of early minimalism—identified usually as its rationality, its musical absolutism, and a radical harmonic staticism that denies traditional linear or goal-oriented musical development.

Often characterized as a “revolt against the double-headed perceived evils of serialism and aleatory,” 27 minimalism actually shares many of the aesthetic priorities of these modernist predecessors. Seemingly, the efforts of early minimalists to deny the priorities of serialism often meant adopting the philosophical tenants of aleatoric music, and vice versa. In countering the intellectual pomp of academic modernism, minimalism adopted aspects of Cageian philosophy, particularly his conception of the work as indeterminate process. 28 But as Jonathan Bernard argues, though Cage represented somewhat of a “kindred spirit” to the anti-establishment spirit of the minimalists, “the music of chance ultimately served the minimalists as a negative ideal, an example of what not to do, in their efforts to create a viable alternative to (what they came to see as) the needless and overly intellectual complexities of serialism.” 29 Cageian indeterminacy rallied too far beyond the establishment trends of academic modernism. Minimalism thus retained from academic atonality the penchant for rationality and control.

Certainly, strict minimalism is a music of rational process. Having been trained in the serial methods of the day, early minimal composers shared with post-war modernism an interest in pre-determined compositional procedure, rather than a reliance on feeling or the ear for


determining, at its simplest, the progression from note to note. For instance, it has been observed that La Monte Young’s *Trio for Strings* (1958) “emulates in long tones the Serial presentation of the tone-row.” Philip Glass introduced additive processes in pieces like his *Music in Fifths* (1969), in which two voices recirculate an 8-note scalar module that consists of a steady stream of eighth-notes moving in parallel motion. In his prefigured configuration, the module expands gradually with each cue, systematically adding groups of two, three, or four notes to varying points along the recirculating module. The 8-note figure broadens to 10 tones, then 12, and proceeds gradually until it the original module has become a 26-note melody. A longer process is presented in Steve Reich’s *Music for Eighteen Musicians* (1976). In this work, writes Bernard, “a series of eleven chords given in the relatively brief opening serves in turn as the basis of a section; this ‘composing out’ accounts for almost the entire duration of the piece.” Reich’s piece is serialism simplified. The initial presentation of a twelve-tone row recalls dodecaphonic works, even if its gradual “composing out” serves only to prolong each of the original eleven harmonies.

While retaining elements of rationality, minimalism departs from the hyper-complexities of 1960s’ modernism. Robert Carl speaks of the “information density” of such works as Elliott Carter’s Concerto for Piano, Luciano Berio’s *Laborintus II*, and Karlheinz Stockhausen’s *Momente*: “All these works fairly scream their authority, their mastery of overwhelming complexity, mirroring a complex age. They bespeak the composer as an expert in sound, a highly trained professional who is able to harness chaos and force it into a rigorous architecture.”

Despite, or because of, European modernism’s dependence on precompositional, formalist

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processes, such as serialism, “appl[ied] to the moment-by-moment events of a work”\textsuperscript{33}—and Ann C. Shreffler reminds us that “most atonal music written after ca. 1950 is indebted to serial principles and techniques”—the degree to which the serial-atonal model’s mathematical and intervallic formulas are perceptible audibly has consistently come under fire.\textsuperscript{34} In contrast to what Steve Reich called the “hidden structural devices” of academic modernism, masked further by a penchant for instrumental pointillism and reluctant non-repetition, composers like Reich sought to write music of structural transparency.\textsuperscript{35} “I am interested in perceptible processes,” Reich wrote in 1968. “I want to be able to hear the process happening throughout the sounding music.”\textsuperscript{36} Compositions in the minimal aesthetic, exemplified by Riley’s \textit{In C} (1964), Glass’s \textit{Music in Fifths}, and Reich’s \textit{Piano Phase} (1967), rarely incorporate material beyond a surface-level procession of traditional—some might say more perceptually identifiable—diatonic materials.

As a counterpoint to the complexity of establishment modernism, minimalism defied aesthetic hierarchies in very much the same way as did Schoenberg’s break with the musical past. Still, its indebtedness to such rational, pre-composition procedures as serialism is well documented. For Kyle Gann, “minimalism and serialism are but opposite sides of the same coin,

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 5.

\textsuperscript{34} Shreffler, “The Myth of Empirical Historiography: A Response to Joseph N. Straus,” \textit{The Musical Quarterly} 84, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 31. Shreffler continues: “To the general or even specialized listening public, the distinction between ordered and unordered sets, or between sets with twelve members or those with only six, is not likely to be perceptible or relevant.” Similarly, H. Wiley Hitchcock and Kyle Gann write that “the twelve-tone technique, which though challenging intellectually to composers, remained resolutely incomprehensible to most listeners.” \textit{Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction}, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000), 325.


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 34.
as notable for their similarities as for their differences.”  

Michael Nyman, likely the first to codify music under the label “minimalism,” sees in the music a hyper-rationalized ideology whose origins lie in serialism: a music that “submits the scrupulously selective, mainly tonal, material to mostly repetitive, highly disciplined procedures which are focused with an extremely fine dedication.”  

Their strictest difference, Elaine Broad writes, is that serialism “hides the compositional structure” while minimalism “wants to expose it.”  

Despite his identification with the anti-establishment philosophies of minimalism, Adams observed in minimalism a certain hyper-rationality which he found antithetical to his own creative impulses. While “other composers find it more beneficial on certain levels of their creative activity to be more rational and procedural,” Adams remarks, “I trust my intuitive sense on many different levels.”  

Adams’ music presents a departure from minimalism’s extreme reduction of materials and its penchant for control, and it is arguable that his system of stratified musical tectonics is one aspect of his music that supports an intuitive approach to melody and other foreground events. 

Like other minimalist composers, Adams emphasizes surface-level events, but his architectural design in Harmonielehre denies the reductionist spirit which so thoroughly defined minimalism as an alternative to the hyper-complexities of academic modernism. His adoption of minimalist devices is not an end, but only the foundation of a textural stratification that functions to support and highlight the superimposed melody. In Example 3.1, the stratifications are grouped through a consideration of note value, instrumentation, timbre, and pitch collections. 

Interwoven eight-notes and triplets between the upper woodwinds and harps, given as Group B.

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37 Gann, “Let X = X,” 147.
38 Michael Nyman, Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 139.
create fairly standard minimalist texture. While the addition of the major seventh and ninth to the E-flat triad is fairly incongruous with typically triadic minimalist harmonies, the stability of this pitch set provides a certain harmonic staticism characteristic of minimalist pieces.

Longer note values are demonstrated in the voicings of Group A. The brass not only color the minimalist foundation through their independent timbre, but also harmonically by adding the pitches A-flat, and C to the existing E-flat minor harmonic sonority. I have categorized the two-voice counterpoint with the brass as Group A in order to underscore that these voices are similar in pitch content and duration. Still, as is shown by its placement at the top of the reduction, the two-point counterpoint should be considered largely independent. Its pitch content does waver from that of the brass (for instance, the A-natural of m. 264 and the D-natural of m. 266), and its melodic content stands out against the harmonic staticism of the single brass chord and the rhythmically churning, but harmonically stable minimalist texture of Group B. Adams has effectively created a foundational, accompanimental minimalist texture above which the counterpoint seems to operate independently and without rigorous pre-compositional process. Consequently, the passage from Harmonielehre—and again, it is one of the least complex passages of the entire work—exemplifies the type of integrated, content-rich textures that distinguishes Adams’ minimalist approach from those of his predecessors.

Catherine Pellegrino has shown that Adams’ works from the late 1970s and early 1980s lend themselves readily to this type of textural analysis, through which she seeks formalist pitch-class relationships not readily observable in the consideration of pitch content of a selected passage without a deconstruction of its stratifications. But while she is able to draw conclusions

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regarding the formalism (or lack thereof) of Adams’ compositions, I find this type of textural construction as integral to what he has identified as his intuitive compositional approach. In examining the stratified layers of Example 3.1, we find a clear melody-accompaniment relationship. The independence of the melody above the motoric pulsations and isolated brass entrances suggest a conception of the foundational textures more in-line with a jazz rhythm section—especially with regard to the brass, the rhythmic and harmonic jazz stylizations of pianist Bill Evans come to mind—or Baroque-era continuo than minimalism. In light of such understanding, might Adams’ melodic approach be intuitive? Even improvisational? Discussing his Naïve and Sentimental Music, the composer admits to precisely such a conception:

> [P]articularly in the first movement, I wrote the accompaniment first. I wrote a very, very long series of chord changes lasting nearly ten minutes, and then I went back and wrote the melody. Of course this is completely against all the rules for melody writing that you learn when you are a student. You are supposed to compose the melody first, and the harmony is supposed to be a result of the melodic implications. But I willfully went against this notion by writing the harmony first and then composing the melody to go with it. But this is not so strange if you think how a great jazz performer would embellish the chord changes of a familiar song. So, in my piece, even though the melody seems like the ‘main event’, in truth it is just a response to the harmony. I composed much of Harmonielehre this way also.  

Adams’ comments demonstrate a rejection of modernism in his creative process. To write out the harmonies of a work prior to composing melodic lines is contradictory to serial processes in which resultant sonorities are the products of independent twelve-tone rows, a conception extending back to Schoenberg’s Harmonielehre, in which he writes that harmony in the work of the “ultramoderns” had become a product of independently moving melodic lines. Instead, Adams equates his minimalist textures to the lead sheet of a jazz standard, relegating them to a

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42 K. Robert Schwarz recognizes melodic-accompanimental relationships in Adams’ music as early as Shaker Loops for string sextet (1978) and affirms the accompanimental function of minimalism in the Harmonielehre that allows for a more intuitive lyricism. See “Process vs. Intuition,” 260 and 269.

43 Adams quoted in Müller-Berg, “Tonal harmony is like a natural force,” 221: emphasis in original.

44 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 389.
function essential in their development importance, but foundational in their support of what
Renaud Machart has characterized as his “floating elegies,” a conception far more lyrically
emotive that the rational objectives and repeated bursts of melodic modules of minimalism.\(^{45}\)
Having established a minimalist *continuo* for his treatment of melody, Adams perhaps takes a
more intuitive, even improvisatory approach to melodic writing.

Nor does Adams rely exclusively on process in fashioning his minimalist textures.
Having relegated these devices to sub-surface, accompanimental functions, Adams develops his
minimalist layers through meticulous orchestration and additive and reductive procedures having
more to do with density and the creation of a sense of motion than with note choice. These
compositional procedures also seem to rely more on Adams’ inherent “sense of form”
(*Formgefühl*) than pre-defined developmental procedures. As Timothy Johnson observes,
“instead of regularly adding or subtracting one note at a time until the pattern is complete, as
Glass does in his minimalist style, Adams freely adds and subtracts notes in an unpredictable
manner.”\(^{46}\) Nor does his harmonic practice seem systematized, suggests Pellegrino, as in the
grammar of traditional tonality: “Unlike works based on functional tonality or serial procedure,
there is no single, all-encompassing explanation for the tonal organization of these works. If fact,
there are many passages that seem to defy any sort of rational explanation.”\(^{47}\)

see in particular p. 386-90. Marchart characterizes melodies throughout Adams’ compositional oeuvre as obligati
existing above and independently the orchestral textures, somewhat like the enigmatic trumpet solo of Charles Ives’
*Unanswered Question*. The “elegiac” solo trumpet indeed plays a role in Part II of *Harmonielehre* (see Chapter 5 of
this dissertation), as it does in Adams’ homage to Ives, *My Father Knew Charles Ives*, and the memorial work, *On
the Transmigration of Souls*. As depicted in Example 3.1, this type of independent melodic voice is a consistent
feature of the *Harmonielehre* as well as the majority of his instrumental compositions.

\(^{46}\) Johnson, “Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?”, 752.

\(^{47}\) Catherine Ann Pellegrino, “Aspects of Closure in the Music of John Adams.” *Perspectives of New Music*
Critics differentiate compositions that are minimal in aesthetic priorities from those that
are stylistically minimalist or which merely rely on the techniques of minimalism. Johnson takes
up the challenge of more precisely defining these degrees of minimalism in his aptly titled essay,
“Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?” where he likewise observes that Adams’ “soaring
melody pulls the music far away from the minimalist style” and is “closer to nineteenth-century
romanticism than to minimalism.”48 When he writes of the minimalist style, Johnson is referring
particularly to the mid-1970s compositions of Steve Reich and Philip Glass. Pieces such as
Reich’s *Music for 18 Musicians* (1976) and Glass’s opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1975)
exemplify for Johnson the features of a minimalist style: textures which consist of, among other
elements, “interlocking rhythmic patterns and pulses,” “simple, (often diatonic) harmonic
materials [and] slow harmonic rhythm,” and “repetitive rhythmic patterns.”49 As I have shown in
the above example, Adams’ composition conforms to each of these stylistic traits. But, the types
of “extended melodies” exhibited by Example 3.1 are neither typical of the minimal style, nor, as
Johnson notes, do they appear in *Music for 18 Musicians* or *Einstein*.50 Johnson’s position that
Adams employs minimalism as simply a compositional technique is valid. To go further, Adams’
relegation of minimalism to that of a “technique” removes its aesthetic pretenses. Minimalism in
Adams’ approach takes on merely an accompanimental function, thereby losing its fundamental
priorities as a surface-level event.

Adams’ relegation of minimalist activity to that of sub-surface, accompanimental
function denies the aesthetic priorities of a music originally predicated on an immediate

48 Johnson, “Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique”, 753. For more on the aesthetics of minimal
music, see Gann, “Let X = X”; Broad, “The New X”; Bernard, “The Minimalist Aesthetic”; and Pellegrino,
“Formalist Analysis in the Context of Postmodern Aesthetics,” 17-50.

49 Johnson, “Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?”, 770.

50 Ibid., 750.
intelligibility. In this regard, Adams’ larger architectural structures perform in a manner similar to Schoenberg’s nuanced presentation of tonality. In order to subvert the pervasive hierarchy of tonality, Schoenberg sought to demystify the relationship between tonality and the physical properties of sound, and to demonstrate its many “imperfect adaptations” of the natural model.\(^{51}\)

By separating minimalism from its surface-level activity, Adams effectively dilutes its vanguard simplicity. The active minimalist layers of *Harmonielehre* do not contain the same aesthetic implications exhibited in the independent sound events of classic minimal compositions; they function in Adams’ work as subsidiary accompaniment. Further, the minimalist scaffoldings establish a foundation above which Adams is able to compose his melodies freely, perhaps even intuitively.\(^{52}\)

II. “Functional Minimalism,” “Projected Motion,” and Dramatic Conflict

Adams’ larger architectural schemes establish clear melodic-accompanimental relationships that are antithetical to the reductionist principles of minimalism. Moreover, issues of genre further diminish minimalism’s typically rigid simplistic means. Modeled after the symphonic works of the late Romantic era, *Harmonielehre* draws on a large contingent of forces consisting of full strings, 4/3/4/4 woodwinds, 4/4/3/2 brass, 2 harps, piano, celesta, and a sizable percussion section. The symphony is a dramatic genre predicated on conflict, alternation, and a

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\(^{52}\) Yet, some have made the effort to demonstrate clear connections between Adams’ melodic lines and those of late Romantic-era compositions, suggesting an interpretation in which Adams consciously appropriates and imitates his melodies. See Brandon Derfler, “Two *Harmonielehren*: Schoenberg and John Adams,” *GAMUT: Journal of the Georgia Association of Music Theorists* 9 (1999): pp. 39-41. In Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation, I examine more fully the concept of *Formgefühl* in Schoenberg’s treatise, the notion that composers cultivate their inner expressive world through the study and imitation of past musical works. This type of assimilation is critical for Schoenberg’s view, presented in his treatise, of composition as spontaneous creation. Adams admits that he actively studied the works of Schoenberg, Sibelius, Mahler, and Ravel, but that he also wrote the 40-minute *Harmonielehre* in a matter of three-to-four months—that the ideas seemed to come spontaneously.
sense of narrative development and forward motion through time. In contrast, the minimalism of the 1960s and ’70s often took on a sort of radical stasis; it purported to be sound existing during time, rather than passing through it. As a symphony, *Harmonielehre* denies this radical conception, and instead operates through the principles conflict and motion which belie its minimalist syntax.

Example 3.2 takes four “snapshots” of the first movement of *Harmonielehre*, given here as Examples 3.2a, 3.2b, 3.2c, and 3.2d. In each example, I have identified the minimalist stratifications which are distinguished by their individual rhythmic or melodic features. The progression of the examples demonstrate the ways in which Adams utilizes limited rhythmic and harmonic means, but nevertheless develops the accompanimental material beneath the composition’s first characteristic gesture, which I label Theme 1 (see Example 3.4 and Table 1 below), through subtle changes in orchestration and density.

Example 3.2a begins in m. 20, just after the first entrance of the symphony’s Theme 1 (also see Example 3.4 and Table 1 below). Flutes and oboes express a primitive melody of repeated tones on the pitch D, and are identified as Stratification Layer 1. The second stratification (marimba and clarinets in A) is characterized by a steady stream of eighth-notes which recirculate the two-note pattern, E-G. Stratification 3 consists of repeated quarter-notes performed at an interval of either two or three quavers. The fourth stratification, provided here solely by the double-bass, sounds a long tone that stabilizes the E-minor harmonic plane.
Example 3.2a – Harmonielehre, Part I (mm. 20-24)
Example 3.2b – Harmonielehre, Part I (mm. 67-72)
Example 3.2c – *Harmonielehre*, Part I (mm. 121-125)
Example 3.2d – *Harmonielehre*, Part I (mm. 159-161)
Despite working in this relatively static harmonic setting, Adams manages to create a sense of forward progression through alterations in instrumentation and manipulation of minimalist patterns. As Example 3.2b shows, the four distinct stratifications presented in Example 3.2a persist. The melody, which Adams has retained in the flute through m. 67, is passed to the brass at the double barline in m. 70. Having performed the sustained tones of Stratification Layer 4 since m. 36, the horns likewise take on the melody at m. 70. Stratification Layer 2, marked by its steady eighth-notes, had formerly recirculated a single two-note motive in the miramba and clarinet. Example 3.2b shows that it has developed in terms of tone color and pitch content, expressing three different recirculating pitch modules: a two-note module in the violin, a three-note module in the clarinets, and six-note module in Harp 1. Oboes, trumpets, and bassoons, which express steady pulsations of quarter-notes, can also be considered a part of the steady rhythmic texture of Stratification 2. In Stratification Layer 3, the number of voices sounding at varying rhythmic intervals has increased. But while Harp 2 and Viola have retained their respective intervals from Example 3.2a, Layer 3 has taken on more irregular rhythmic treatment in the addition of the piccolo, piano, and glockenspiel.

Adams complements the start of a new melodic event, illustrated in Example 3.2c, by simplifying, and thus rebooting the minimalist-accompanimental motor. He develops the primitive melodic idea presented by the flutes and oboes in Example 3.2a (given in its entirety in Example 3.4) through more disjunct linear writing, harmonization in the upper woodwinds and piano, and non-strict canonic imitation (see Example 3.2c, Layer 1.1 and 1.2). Beneath, a simpler minimalist syntax has emerged, and it bears significant resemblance to the texture illustrated in Example 3.2a. The steady streams of Stratification Layer 2 has subsided back to a steady current of eighth-notes presented in the violas and celli, and Layer 3, in which quarter-notes are given
every other beat, likewise returns to its simplest rhythmic texture since the first appearance of Theme 1. The minimalist texture is colored by the upper strings, which provide the long tones of Layer 4. Such simplification creates a sense of arrival—or, better, a sense of a new beginning—as the first theme of the symphony is *re*-presented.

Example 3.2d presents a weakening of the minimalist foundation that had been stable sense its emergence 145 measures earlier. The bass voices of Stratified Layer 3 steadily sound quarter-notes on every other quarter value, but theirs is the most stable layer of the minimalist texture. Remnants of the melodic canon persist, but in voices less audibly noteworthy than the woodwinds and brass that had carried it before. Layer 2 no longer projects short melodic recirculations, but, rather, independent and ever-broadening arpeggiations. But perhaps most significantly, two layers appear in this example that had not previously been apparent. Layer 5 had begun several bars earlier in m. 136 as a brief splash of rhythmic eighth-notes in the trumpets (see Example 3.3). This motive seems to infiltrate and infect the texture by m. 159, where Example 3.2d begins, appearing in the flutes, trumpets, xylophones, and upper strings (Layer 5). A second, arpeggiated germ begins in m. 160 as Layer 6. As the minimalist texture progresses forward, Layers 5 and 6 begin to dominate the texture. The emphasis on these new materials creates a sense of departure at the same time that Adams places the tone $B$, the diatonically weaker fifth of E minor, in the bass.

**Example 3.3 – Trumpet Rhythmic Motive (m. 136)**
Through manipulation of orchestration, density and a layering of minimalist textures, Adams creates a perception of forward progression, tension and repose, and departure and arrival within which harmony plays a supportive, rather than central role. At least two articles seemingly provide language to describe this characteristic of Adams’ developmental approach, yet neither succeed in fully defining their terms. First, in his “Six Case Studies,” Robert Carl writes of Harmonielehre that “the new-found language of ‘functional minimalism’ was combined with an impulse toward hyperdramatic gesture.”53 Carl’s use of “functional minimalism,” while not entirely clear, seemingly invokes the type of harmonic syntax more or less universal in the Western art music of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Theorists such as Pellegrino often use the term “functional tonality” to denote the tonic-dominant syntax of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century harmonic practice.54 This syntax consists of a hierarchical relationship between the triads of a given diatonic scale in which subdominant harmonies gravitate through the dominant toward the tonic, or fundamental, triad.

However, I do not believe that Carl is invoking this practice literally because neither Adams’ Harmonielehre nor his music, in general, exhibit strong tonic-dominant relationships (Grand Pianola Music applies the syntax in excess, in a parodistic fashion). Rather, Carl seems to be evoking the sense of motion which tonal-harmonic relationships impart. Departure from tonic necessitates a return, whereby the composer “attain[s] a certain completeness or closure (Geschlossenheit) by means of a certain uniformity,” writes Schoenberg in his Harmonielehre.55 Within most all European instrumental art music written between 1750 and 1900, the departure


54 Pellegrino, “Aspects of Closure,” 149.

55 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 27.
from and return to tonic manifests itself globally and locally in a work as exemplary of beginning, middle, and end. Localized events exhibit this three part motion in the preparation, sounding, and resolution of dissonance, and in the I (IV)-V-I harmonic pattern of a “closed” period. Schenkerian analysis of traditional tonal compositions demonstrates this principle at work in the large-scale harmonic structure of a composition by reducing this structure to that of a localized, three-note progression.\textsuperscript{56} Similarly, entire movements or compositions are often described narratologically as a “journey away from a ‘home’ key to ‘foreign’ territory and back again.”\textsuperscript{57} Thus, harmonic “function” connotes a goal-oriented process centered in the conflict between tonic and dominant (or consonance and dissonance: see Chapter 2 of this study), in which harmonic motion away from tonic ultimately seeks reconciliation, closure, and thus wholeness (\textit{perfectio}).

We cannot be sure that Carl intended “functional minimalism” as a descriptor for the perception of motion in Adams’ \textit{Harmonielehre}. The term most likely refers to the homophonic nature of the work (which I discuss above), in which a scaffolding of minimalist devices “functions” largely in an accompanimental role that provides key center and a consistent underpinning of steady pulsations in support of the melody. Further, the “functional,” teleological motion of traditional tonality’s tripartite harmonic progression owes its existence to an insistence on closure or wholeness (\textit{perfectio}) conveyed musically by return to the fundamental, or tonic, triad. But, as Catherine Pellegrino has shown, closure in Adams’ version

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Charles Rosen similarly makes the connection between localized motion created by the preparation and resolution of dissonance, and the larger harmonic conflict present in the departure from and return to tonic: “Modulation in the eighteenth century must be conceived as essentially a dissonance raised to a higher plane, that of the total structure. A passage in a tonal work that is outside the tonic is dissonant in relation to the whole piece, and demands resolution if the form is to be completely closed and the integrity of the cadence respected.” \textit{The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven}, expanded edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 26.
\item Pellegrino, “Aspects Closure,” 161.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
of tonality is sometimes “ambiguous and problematized,” partly because of his resistance to relying on the tonic-dominant conflict, classical structural models, and the cadential formulae therein, and partly because of the gradual nature of his minimalist developmental procedures. On the one hand, works such as Common Tones in Simple Time (1979) and The Chairman Dances (1985) conclude convincingly, Pellegrino insists, because of their quiet, gradually fading endings. On the other hand, a perceptual sense of closure is less convincing in, for instance, the third movement of Adams’ Harmonielehre and other compositions that end loudly and abruptly. Pellegrino argues that Adams’ inconsistent expression of closure is subjective, “merely one option among many, to be selected or not, or to be participated in to a greater or lesser extent.” Adams’ Harmonielehre does indeed convey a sense of moving forward, and it even submits to the dramatic rhetoric of conflict and resolution and dialectical thematic struggle (see below), but his complacency toward communicating satisfying closure perhaps relegates Carl’s descriptor of “functional minimalism” to an approximation.

More to the point is the concept of “projected motion,” which Jankowitz and Rörich introduce in their paper, “What Quackie Said to Meister Eckhart: Intertextuality, Projected Motion and Doubling Coding in John Adams’s Harmonielehre”:

directionalized tonal procedure overruns minimalist process . . . . [T]he gear of the music is ratcheted up, it be comes thicker, louder, more active . . . . What the listener feels is an illusion of being projected or catapulted forward (quite different from the minimalist experience of ‘being in the moment’ and contemplating rather than moving through time;


59 Forest Glenn Greenough’s graphical analysis of Harmonielehre. Part I supports Pellegrino’s views that closure in Adams’ music is better indicated by a slower, softer, or less dense musical setting. He notes that points of lowest density in the movement are also points of structural significance: the end of the A section (m. 234) and B section (m. 427). “Progressive Density in John Adams’ Harmonielehre: A Systematic Analytic Approach with Original Composition” (DMA thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 2005), 46, ProQuest (AAT 3171939) Still, it is important to speak in terms of approximations in measures when speaking of structure in Adams’ music.

his/her expectation (learned from traditional tonal music) is of some kind of structural resolution and emotional catharsis.  

“Projected motion” sufficiently describes Adams’ ability to create tension and release through methods other than the organization of key area. And their above description of the term is seemingly supported by Greenough’s graphical representations of Adams’ music. By measuring such parameters as sonority, register, dynamics, number of instruments, and background and foreground rhythmic configurations or repetitions. Greenough finds that Adams’ use of density is progressive and cyclical: the intensity of the progressive density of a passage gradually increases to its ultimate release, at which point the density drops off immediately, and the process starts over. This cyclical process is reflected in my own Example 3.2, in which the denser minimalist textures of 3.2b and 3.2d create a sense of conflict or departure that is resolved in simpler passages such as that illustrated in 3.2c. Rörich’s and Jankowitz’s “projected motion” loses the weighty, tonal implications of “function,” and instead centers on what Gann describes as a “tempestuous emotional sweep” of Adams’ music that is reflective of an emotional subjectivity that is as foreign to the minimal aesthetic as Adams’ “directionalized rhetoric.” Indeed, Jankowitz and Rörich intend their language to reflect what they see as Adams’s rejection of the static, non-representational nature of the minimalist-modernist objective.

Minimal music is often music of a sort of radicalized stasis achieved through its reductionist principles. Extremely gradual changes in harmony, uniformity in timbre, and consistent, often ceaseless pulsation combine to create a Zen-like calmness distinguishable from

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62 Greenough, “Progressive Density in John Adams’ Harmonielehre.” Greenough suggests a quantifiable analytical method that portrays linear development in Adams’ music through the measurement of musical density.

63 Ibid. See specifically pp. 35 and 52-53.

the unsettling quality of unresolved dissonance or the sense of departure and return conveyed by a movement away from and back toward tonic. Wim Mertens aptly describes the antithetical relationship of minimalism to teleological musical function:

The traditional work is teleological or end-oriented, because all musical events result in a directed end or synthesis. The composition appears as a musical product characterized by an organic totality. By the underlying dynamic, dramatizing construction, a directionality is created that presumes a linear memory in the listener, that forces him or her to follow the linear musical evolution. . . . The music of the American composers of repetitive music can be described as non-narrative and a-teological. Their music discards the traditional harmonic functional schemes of tension and relaxation and (currently) disapproves of classical formal schemes and the musical narrative that goes with them (formalizing a tonal and/or thematic dialectic). Instead there appears non-directed evolution in which the listener is no longer submitted to the constraint of following the musical evolution.65

The Western musical tradition, beginning with its earliest contrapuntal practices, cultivated a conception of sound proceeding through motion and time, predicated on the notation of diverse, measured durations and the notion that points of cadence are also points of more perfect consonance. The preparation and resolution of dissonance conveyed this motion, as did the emergence of the tonic-dominant conflict.

Moreover, alternation, contrary motion, is prioritized in Western music, as depicted in the fast-slow-fast layout of a three-movement sinfonia, between the forces of a concerto or the instrumental and vocal contingents of a Bach cantata, and in the dramatic interplay of thematic-characteristic passages in the Romantic-era symphony. In contrast, minimalism is music devoid of alternation: “Practically every musical element—harmony, rhythm, dynamics, instrumentation—remains fixed for the duration of the work, or changes only very slowly.”66

Minimalism’s diatonicism, its constant rhythmic values, and its gradual successions of highly


consonant sonorities convey no sense of beginning, middle, and end. Its fragmented melodies (when they do appear) lack the substance to produce thematic conflict. Glass speaks of a minimalist conception in which “Music must be listened to as a pure sound-event, an act without any dramatic structure.”67 The minimal aesthetic views music as merely sound existing during time, rather than passing through it (see, for example, Young’s Composition 1960 No. 7, for which Young writes just two notes, a B and F-sharp, and the instruction “to be held for a long time”).68

This staticism is a marker of minimalism’s avant-gardeness which Elaine Broad argues lends itself to “the conception of the non-narrative, work-as-process” shared by minimalism and Cageian experimentalism.69 This conception is exemplified in the phase pieces of Steve Reich, who outlined this position securely in 1968 in the opening remark to his oft-cited “Music as Gradual Process”: “I do not mean the process of composition but rather pieces of music that are, literally, processes.”70 For instance, in Piano Phase (1967), two pianists repeat a twelve-note pattern of sixteenth-notes in unison. The second pianist increases the tempo of her performance of the motif slightly until it gradually pulls ahead of the first. The process is complete when the second pianist has pulled ahead far enough that it has caught up with the first pianist, whose tempo has remained constant, and the two are again performing the pattern in unison. A second pattern is then introduced, and the process starts over. The result of such rationalized process is an objective, impersonal type of music which Glass considers strictly absolutist. “Music is not a

67 Philip Glass quoted in Mertens, American Minimal Music, 88.

68 Ibid., 26.

69 Broad, “A New X?”, 51-52; emphasis in original. See also pp. 55-56.

70 Reich, “Music as Gradual Process,” 34. The reader will note that serialism is likewise an aesthetic of precompositional determination. As I have noted above, Reich distinguishes his aesthetic from serialism in that his processes are audible.
literal interpretation of life and the experience of time is different. It does not deal with events in
a clear directional structure. . . . Music no longer has a mediative function, referring to something
outside itself, but it rather embodies itself without any mediation.” 71 The music of Reich, Glass,
Young, and Riley, particularly before 1975, is modernist in its objectivity, rationality, simplicity,
and rejection of timeless Western musical priorities.

It is in the dramatic conflict of Harmonielehre that Adams thus departs further from the
aesthetic priorities of minimalism. The organization of thematic material in the composition
betrays what he has identified as a panoramic conception of his pieces:

The formal idea with my music is that something appears on the event horizon, and then
it increases in importance as it begins to dominate the screen, and then it passes you and
it’s gone. . . . It’s very different from rhetorical form, which organized a dialectical
discussion of opposing motives or gestures: an A theme and a B theme, a thesis and an
antithesis.” 72

Certainly, strict structural divisions in Harmonielehre are obscured by Adams’s use of
minimalist procedures like dovetailing, in which certain repetitive material of a new section
appears while elements of the previous section remain to be complete and only gradually wane
(see Example 3.2d). And this type of technique does give the impression in Harmonielehre of
very gradual development between musical passages, in contrast to the strict divisions
established by cadences in conventional tonality. Still, Harmonielehre does exhibit a clear
distinction between primary and secondary characteristic gestures, and the alternation between
their differing thematic content is a central driving agent to the score.

As in typical Romantic-era symphonies, Adams’ thematic material consists of two
contrasting melodic gestures which I will refer to as Themes despite their incongruous
repetitions throughout the composition. Theme 2, illustrated in Example 3.1, Group A, has been

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71 Glass quoted in Mertens, American Minimal Music, 88.

discussed extensively above. It is characterized by its lyricism and roundness, by its scoring in the upper-registers of the Horn and Cello, and by its longer note values which prolong dissonances above the shimmering accompaniment. These traits are in stark contrast to those of the first appearance of Theme 1, given here as Example 3.4. Aptly characterized by Robert Fink as an “anti-melody,” Theme 1 is sharp and pointed, and it is agitated in its irregular rhythmic pattern. Repeating a single pitch, it is minimalist in conception, and its modest scoring in the lower-middle range of the flutes and oboes complement its shorter note values.

Example 3.4 – *Harmonielehre*, Part I, Theme 1 (mm. 19-31)

*Harmonielehre* develops through the entirety of its three movements primarily as an alternation between the of the two dialectical melodic gestures. Table 1 catalogues the progression of musical passages in *Harmonielehre*. The work is comprised primarily of two types of musical passages: thematic and transitional. Similar to the opposing nature of the two themes, the composition’s two transitional passages present material of dissimilar characteristics. I identify the two themes and two transitional passages in Table 1 as 1) Minimalist Theme 1; 2) Transition Passage 1; 3) Romantic-Lyrical Theme 2; and 4) Transition Passage 2: Chromatic Decent. Surely further subdivisions can be found and their relevance debated, but it seems to me that Adams is working with extremely large gestures created by and developed through additive minimalist processes. Significantly, these passages are distinguishable more by their general impression than by any single melody. For instance, the secondary Romantic-lyrical theme appears in each of the composition’s three movements. The only true recapitulation of melodic material occurs at the return of Minimalist Theme 1 in the third movement. Rather than labeling the various manifestations of the thematic material, I believe it is enough for our purposes here to view this material as a single type of musical gesture. By doing so, the dramatic interplay, the *alternation*, between large-scale musical passages of varying and contradictory characteristics becomes visible.

Augmenting the dramatic conflict between minimalist and Romantic-lyric thematic material is the conflict between E minor and E-flat major tonalities. The conflict begins as early as m. 59, when Adams “gates” from E to E-flat through what Derfler has identified as R-5 shift. The two harmonies share the common tone $G$, which remains constant while both the root (R) and the chordal fifth (5) each descend by semitone. The passage then oscillates between the two harmonic regions, returning to E-minor in m. 64, E-flat major in m. 70, and E-minor in m. 76.
Table 1 – *Harmonielehre*, Progression of Characteristic Passages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Approximate Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Part I</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Repeated incomplete E-minor sonorities</td>
<td>1 - 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimalist Theme 1</td>
<td>15 - 177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Passage 1</td>
<td>178 - 254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic-Lyrical Theme 2</td>
<td>254 - 416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Passage 2: Chromatic Decent</td>
<td>417 - 438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimalist Theme 1 (false recapitulation)</td>
<td>438 - end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Part II</em> – “The Anfortas Wound”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic-Lyrical Theme 2</td>
<td>1 - 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Passage 2: Chromatic Decent</td>
<td>25 - 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Material: Homages to Mahler and Schoenberg</td>
<td>52 - end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Part III</em> – “Meister Eckhardt and Quackie”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic-Lyrical Theme 2</td>
<td>1 - 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Passage 2: Chromatic Decent</td>
<td>96 - 119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Passage 1</td>
<td>120 - 187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimalist Theme 1 (recapitulation)</td>
<td>188 - 309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Heroic’ Conclusion in E-flat major</td>
<td>310 - end</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, it is in the final movement of *Harmonielehre* that the E-minor, E-flat major conflict reaches an epic climax. Here, Adams has drawn on the Romantic-era trope of traveling from darkness to light, from minor to major, that characterizes some of the most prominent Romantic-era symphonies. The ultimate triumph of E-flat major, Beethoven’s “heroic” key, recalls the symphonic compositions of Beethoven, Mahler, and Bruckner. Adams’ own description is apt:

> At the end of *Harmonielehre*, . . . a tremendous harmonic struggle for keys takes place in order to see which one is going to come out the victor. Now, in a more traditionally worked-out tonal piece, there would be a modulatory sequence that would present the outcome in a rather dialectical way. But in this case, I simply place the keys together, as

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74 For reasons I have discussed above, the structural divisions in minimalist compositions are sometimes best discussed in approximations.
if in a mixer, and let them battle it out. And finally, E-flat won out through its strength, and this moment seems like an epiphany.75

The climactic ending might depict a dramatic struggle between two harmonic forces, but it similarly expresses a more perfect harmonic conclusion. Harmonielehre opens with only two pitches, E-G that establish the E-minor tonality. One might recall Schoenberg’s characterization of the minor mode as artificial and inconsistent with the properties of the natural model. As with many pieces throughout Western music, Adams’ Harmonielehre concludes in major mode, the one that conveys a greater sense of repose, closure, and wholeness (perfectio). Its final sonority of a perfect fifth, E-flat–B-flat, is an even simpler imitation of the first overtones, an purer expression of naturalness against what Adams viewed as the unnatural static, non-narrative aesthetic presumptions of minimalism. The dramatic structure, conflict, and directionalized motion of Harmonielehre better imitates qualities universal to the human experience.

III. Part 1 Conclusions

The Harmonielehre of John Adams relies extensively on the language of minimalism. It pulses with Reichian timbres, travels gradually through mostly diatonic harmonic planes, and interlaces small canonic fragments of rhythmic and harmonic stability. And yet its composite experience, which is one of considerable architecture and dramatic extremes, belies a minimalism founded in notions of simplified, surface-level gestures and passive meditation. Adams’ objectives lie not in furthering the vanguard priorities of the minimalist aesthetic, but rather in synthesizing the new-found language of minimalism with the listening expectations of the musical past. By relying extensively on the major-minor conflict, as well as markedly

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dissimilar minimalist and Romantic-lyrical gestures, Adams draws on the rhetorical power of alternation and contrary motion to convey a sense of departure and return, conflict and resolution. Further, the repetition of previously stated musical gestures at the end of each movement communicates effectively closure and rest, priorities that had been challenged by experimentalist notions of non-linearity. Adams likewise defies academic priorities of objectivity and rationality. His appropriation of minimalism as foundational and accompanimental support for additional, surface-level musical events allows for a more intuitive approach to composition of melody. While minimalist devices saturate the first and third movements in particular, Adams adopts these textures as a means by which to create a large, expressive symphonic work irrespective of the guiding aesthetic principles of its time and place.

But whether or not Adams truly intended his composition as a polemic against modernist priorities, to view his invocation of Arnold Schoenberg, the oft-declared “high-priest” of modernism, as a statement against Schoenberg’s artistic values would be simplistic and uninformed. On the contrary, Adams’ composition is a statement of artistic independence not too far removed from Schoenberg’s own Harmonielehre, despite their differences in time, space, and material. Both Harmonielehren take as their material an accepted framework—for Adams, minimalism, for Schoenberg tonality—with the intent of undermining that framework. Adams’ composition draws heavily on minimalist features, but challenges the aesthetic judgments that brought those techniques into practice. And surely, a textbook on tonality written by the man most responsible for its widespread dissolution could not be a simple pedagogical manual. As bookends for an often contentious musical climate of the twentieth century, the Harmonielehren of Adams and Schoenberg both comment on the aesthetic concerns of their respective time and location. In this light, Schoenberg’s Harmonielehre might best be viewed as a model for

philosophical and aesthetic statement—which is, after all, exactly what he intended his *Harmonielehre* to be.
PART 2

“AN IMPOSING HEAP OF UNEXAMINED SCRAP MATERIAL”: CREATIVE IDENTIFICATION AND COMPOSITIONAL PHILOSOPHY

By definition, being a member of the avant-garde means being in motion.

Michael Walsh

Such was the standard of judgment by which Michael Walsh criticized *Available Light*, a collaboration between John Adams and minimalist dance choreographer Lucinda Childs, with set design by architect Frank Gehry, commissioned for the “Temporary Contemporary” series of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art in 1983. It is not remarkable that this type of criticism would be directed toward an avant-garde production involving Adams, a tonal composer who, in his use of tertian harmonies and greater expressivity in works such as *Harmonium* (1981), had already been identified as one in a new movement of neoromantic composers. What is remarkable about Walsh’s remark is that, in making it clear that the ballet’s weakness lies in its conflicting aesthetic objectives, he directed the statement primarily toward Childs’ choreography:

Striking though the individual elements are, they do not always mesh. Although Childs says her dance is closely allied with Adams’ music, too often the two clash: the sounds urgent, the movements passive. Further, visual minimalism palls more quickly than its aural counterpart, and beside Adams’ expanded vocabulary, Childs’ monochromaticism looks dated.

For Walsh, the failure of the ballet was not simply that, as Adams recognized, Childs’ choreography “is frequently on another planet, expressively, from what’s going on in the

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3 Walsh, “Minimalists 3,” 70.
music.”⁴ The production’s weakness was the very clear discrepancy between Childs’ direct, sharp, minimalist choreography and Adams’ complication of musical minimalism “from the school’s strict repetition and steady-rhythm tenets toward something more expansive and formally flexible.”⁵ Walsh identifies Adams’ liberal approach to the minimalist aesthetic as the progressive feature of the production, dismissing Childs’ purer minimalist dance gestures as “dated” in comparison. Though he doesn’t precisely herald Adams for “actively moving forward” artistically, he implicitly criticizes Childs for “surely moving backward.”⁶ Seemingly by 1983, with minimalism well into its second decade of counterculture avant-gardism, composers and critics alike were beginning to question whether strict minimalism was avant-garde enough.

Walsh’s comment holds deep cultural implications. The “motion” to which he refers is rooted in the philosophical act of contemplation, Aristotle’s “being-at-the-work of knowledge” (theoria), or the active, uncompromising, step-by-step progression toward a truth, “for it is by the coming to rest and standing still of the thinking part that we are said to know and understand.”⁷ Artistically, being in motion implies a certain impasse with the prevailing models and an unyielding quest for more satisfying methods of expression—in a sense, the avoidance of rest, which would signal conformity with an artistic model and culmination of active searching. Of his dissatisfaction with the conventions of tonality (its hierarchical approach to consonance and dissonance, its supposed compromised relationship with nature), Arnold Schoenberg writes:

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⁵ Walsh, “Minimalists 3,” 70.
⁶ Ibid.
. . . we are the searchers, the restless, who will not tire . . . as long as we have not solved the problems that are contained in tones. We may indeed always be barred from actual attainment of this goal. But more certainly, we shall have no rest before we do; the searching spirit will not stop pursuing these problems until it has solved them, solved them in a way that comes as close as anyone can to actual solution. I think, then, contrary to the point of view of those who take insolent pride in the attainments of others and hold our system to be the ultimate, the definitive musical system – contrary to that point of view, I think we stand only at the beginning. We must go ahead!8

Schoenberg’s passage, taken from his Harmonielehre, places in the foreground the implicit creed of Walsh’s comment. The passage avows a restlessness of spirit and a fervent, active search, progressing forward (“We must go ahead!”) toward a better understanding of the materials of music, a working out of the “problems that are contained in the tones.” Moreover, it expresses dissatisfaction with the prevailing, supposedly “definitive” tonal model. As is well known, this impasse marked the beginning of Schoenberg’s own inquiry into post-tonal composition and, later, the method of composing with twelve tones. And while Schoenberg certainly was not the first to espouse such a philosophy, it is his compositional ideology, exemplified in his musical works and articulated in his Harmonielehre, which set into “motion” the search for new systems of organizing sound substance that drove the musical-historical narrative of the twentieth century. In its questioning of the perceived truths of tonality, Schoenberg’s Harmonielehre presents a model of the composer as truth-seeker.

As indicated in Walsh’s comments about Light Over Water (John Adams’ independently titled composition for multi-track tape and brass that accompanied Childs’ ballet, Available Light), Adams’ efforts to remain “in motion” led him not only to adopt the language of minimalism, but also to move beyond what Adams has often described as its purity and

“confined emotional bandwidth.” In his next composition, the *Harmonielehre* for orchestra, Adams complicated his minimalist syntax with the lush, expressive gestures of late Romantic-era symphonicism, and progressed the style further beyond its aesthetic roots than perhaps it had yet been taken (see Chapter 3). Nevertheless, Adams’ *Harmonielehre* does not simply parody the supposed expressionless aesthetic of minimalism, as has been suggested by some. And while we can acknowledge *Harmonielehre*, as its creator does, as “a statement of belief in the power of tonality at a time when I was uncertain about its future,” there is still more to be said of the relationship between Adams’ *Harmonielehre* and the treatise by Schoenberg from which the composition takes its name, and what this relationship tells us about Adams’ creative identification.

Like Schoenberg, Adams distanced himself from the prevailing compositional models of the previous generation. Yet, his impasse with the immediate musical past is not reconciled through the development of a new musical language or the exploration of untapped musical resources, as was exemplified in Schoenberg’s break from tonality. Having entered the contemporary music scene in the latter part of the twentieth century, Adams had at his disposal a wealth of musical traditions and styles with which to fashion and hone his individualized

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approach. His treatment of a diverse range of musical materials and techniques, as reflected in
the synthesis of minimalism and Romantic-era stylizations in his *Harmonielehre*, seemingly
indicates a reinvestment into musical craftsmanship.

A subtle discourse within Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre* is the presentation of two
differing creative models: what I have identified above as the “truth-seeker,” a role almost self-
sacrificial in its pursuit of motion, and the model of the composer as craftsman, a more
vocational conception centered in a working with pre-existing and identifiable sound materials. It
is within this dialogue that Part 2 of this dissertation explores the relationship between the two
*Harmonielehren* of Adams and Schoenberg. Chapter 4 takes Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre* as its
focus. I detail the ways in which Schoenberg, as author, takes on the varying artistic identities of
craftsman and truth-seeker. These creative identifications reflect Schoenberg’s dual purposes in
presenting the fundamentals of harmony while attempting to instill in his readers an empathy for
radical musical means. Schoenberg makes little attempt to reconcile these personas; rather, he
distinguishes between the priorities of the true artist, one who is driven by an inner compulsion
to quest tirelessly for more expressive possibilities, and the musical craftsman, the artist who is
satisfied with mastering the existing, “found” musical means. Schoenberg is not always
successful in balancing these two identifications; ultimately, he dismisses the conception of
music as craftsmanly activity, as the placing-together-of pre-existing sound materials, in favor of
the truth-seeker’s exploration of inner substance.

Chapter 5 examines these varying artistic conceptions as they are reflected in the musical
features of John Adams’ *Harmonielehre*. Contented with minimalism as a starting place for his
mature compositional approach, and convinced of its fundamental qualities of musical
coherence, Adams is concerned less with the type of urgent quest for new musical means
modeled in Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre*, and taken up time and again throughout the twentieth century. Rather, his creative identification as exhibited in his own *Harmonielehre* for orchestra rests on a placing-together-of and imitation of the pre-existing musical materials of culture. Adams’ craftsmanship is reflected in the composition’s grand edifices, which take as their foundation (as a cantus firmus) both minimalist and expressionist musical gestures. Adams builds his *Harmonielehre*, chunk by chunk, in a manner not similar to the ways in which composers for generations have selected and fashioned pre-existing sound materials.

The relationship between the two *Harmonielehren* of Adams and Schoenberg is thus paradoxical. Part 1 of this study details some of the ways that the *Harmonielehre* of Adams expresses an ideological impasse with the compositional priorities of the late 1970s and early ’80s. In this regard, the composition is not too distant conceptually from Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre*, which is an expression of artistic freedom. Yet, unlike Schoenberg, Adams’ mode of creative expression is not centered in a radical reconceptualization of musical means. In minimalism, Adams found the syntactical building blocks from which he would cultivate a highly personal language in which musical artifacts from the past and present interact freely. In titling his composition after Schoenberg’s treatise, Adams opens a dialogue between the two works by which he situates his own artistic proclivities next to, and perhaps in contrast with, those of one of music history’s most controversial figures. I intend to show that their creative differences are visible in the notions of truth and craft presented in Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre*. 
CHAPTER 4

Harmonic and Historical Discord: The Composer as Philosopher

Musicians wanted compositions to end on a perfect consonance, because they correctly saw that the perfection of anything depends upon and is judged by its end. . . . The rule is well grounded, inasmuch as compositions ending otherwise leave the audience in a state of suspense, awaiting a final perfection.

--Gioseffo Zarlino

On 14 July, 1910, the Verein für Kunst und Kultur in Vienna organized a concert featuring the music of Arnold Schoenberg. The event consisted largely of performances of compositions exhibiting Schoenberg’s newfound harmonic language. The Drei Klavierstücke, Op. 11, was performed, as was the George-Lieder, Op. 15, of which Schoenberg, in his program note, acknowledged, “I am conscious of having broken through every restriction of a bygone aesthetic.” Schoenberg must have realized that any verbal justification for the types of unrestricted dissonances exhibited in these compositions would not placate listeners or aesthetes. He consequently included in the performance a still unorchestrated version of his cantata Gurrelieder (1900-01) as evidence, the composer writes:

. . . that I am being forced in this direction not because my invention or technique is inadequate nor because I am uninformed about all the other things the prevailing aesthetics demand, but that I am obeying an inner compulsion, which is stronger than any up-bringing: that I am obeying the formative process which, being the one natural to me, is stronger than my artistic education.

Writing this program note roughly around the same time that he began to draft his Harmonielehre, a text in which he constructs an extensive apologia of his advanced compositional philosophy, Schoenberg describes the edgy, unfamiliar techniques of the Piano Pieces, Op. 11 and George-Lieder as products of an intense “inner compulsion.” Schoenberg

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3 Ibid.
claims to be driven by an unseen force which compels him to discount the precepts of music education. And to combat probable accusations of inexperience, technical ineptitude, or fraud, he includes on the program one of his few compositions to be hailed critically in its own time. The *Gurrelieder* is the signal achievement of his pre-atonal compositional oeuvre and a marker of his earnestness as a composer through its demonstrated mastery of the traditional idiom.

Largely self-taught, Schoenberg maintained a profound respect of the musical past despite his impulse to compose beyond the established musical models. Leon Kirchner, a former pupil of Schoenberg and John Adams’ main composition instructor at Harvard, characterizes Schoenberg’s immense knowledge of the Western canon as no less than “frightening”:

> It was his literally total command of what music was about—his memory of every Beethoven chamber work or symphony, his memory of every Brahms work. I observed that he was able to recognize a work by just simply glancing at a measure of it.  

Having foregone the rigors of formal education, and having studied only for a short time under the tutelage of Alexander Zemlinsky, Schoenberg would have learned to compose primarily through his own careful study and imitation of the Austro-German musical legacy. This experience no doubt informed his approach to teaching composition. Even with his most advanced students, for instance the composer and conductor Otto Klemperer, Schoenberg spent little time discussing atonality or the twelve-tone system, but rather “analyzed for my benefit many works of the masters, such as, for instance, the motets of Bach.”  

As I discuss in Chapter 2, Schoenberg largely seeks in the *Harmonielehre* to reassert the authority of the composer over his material and apart from aesthetics. Maintaining that “the pupil learns most of all through the

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example shown him by the masters in their masterworks,”6 Schoenberg emphasizes a conception of musical craftsmanship in which, guided by the pens of the master composers before him, the student-apprentice learns to shape the materials of music not according to the codifications of theory nor the baseless judgments of aesthetics, but to the tried-and-true methods demonstrated in the great works of the past.

Schoenberg’s appeal to craftsmanship, however compelling, is nonetheless surpassed in the Harmonielehre by a discourse of artistic restlessness. Two passages demonstrate a very clear distinction between instructing the pupil as would an experienced artisan passing along knowledge and insight to an apprentice, and teaching the art of composition:

If I should succeed in teaching the pupil the handicraft of our art as completely as a carpenter can teach his, then I shall be satisfied.7

The pupil does not learn to express himself when he imitates the techniques of models. Actually, the real artist is unteachable in the first place. If we show him ‘how he must do it’, and base what we say on the fact that others have also done it that way, then that may be instruction in art, but it is not instruction of the artist.8

Schoenberg is not content to model for the reader the techniques of the traditional harmonic practice. Rather, what Schoenberg models is an approach to composition in which the synthesis of firmly established musical practices is requisite for the exploration and logical representation of inner impressions. The text incorporates strikingly few examples drawn from the musical literature, and Schoenberg’s own musical examples are admittedly skeletal, appearing not as chorales or thematic phrases, but as collections of whole tones progressing from one chord to the next. In his many aesthetic passages and historical musings, Schoenberg demonstrates a mode of

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7 Ibid., 12.

8 Ibid., 411.
critical inquiry that is as central to his teaching as is the presentation of harmony: “I hope my pupils will commit themselves to searching!” Schoenberg aims to unsettle his readers, to set into motion their own critical questioning of the presumptions of the musical past, and to instill in them a restless, searching artistic spirit not unlike his own.

In this chapter, I elucidate two seemingly contradictory creative philosophies at work in the Harmonielehre. Schoenberg appropriates a language of musical craftsmanship in order to claim agency as author of the treatise and teacher of his art, and to re-claim the authority of the contemporary composer over his material. The musical craftsman is guided by the natural properties of his material and also by the cultural models before him. The works of the past constitute a body of knowledge and experience which the musical apprentice should not merely imitate, but synthesize within his musical-intellectual framework. Schoenberg as truth-seeker seemingly departs from all cultural models. His restless quest inward for more expressive possibilities suggests a compositional framework divorced from pre-existing sound vocabularies. Schoenberg equates composition in the Harmonielehre to the act of producing knowledge, and I detail the ways in which his adoption of the two creative identities of the master carpenter and truth-seeker allows him to detail the materials of music and their common treatment in the literature while modeling an approach to composition that takes on connotations of philosophy and scientific discovery.

I. The Metaphysics of Craft

To speak of music composition as a handicraft comparable to good cabinet making is useful for Schoenberg in describing the composer’s task in handling what Paul Hindemith has

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9 Ibid., 1.
likewise characterized as the “practical raw material for composition.”

Pedagogically, working with sound material may be a difficult concept to grasp because sound is not physical matter, but unseen, incorporeal substance. Thus, throughout the entirety of the treatise, Schoenberg returns to the metaphor the master craftsman who works with and must choose judiciously from the materials of nature:

And if the carpenter knows which types of wood are required by a particular job and selects accordingly, he is thus taking natural relationships and materials into account, just as does the music theorist when, appraising the possibilities of themes, he recognizes how long a piece may be.

The analogy of the carpenter and other tradesmen harnessing the pre-existing materials of nature exemplifies and rationalizes what would otherwise be the intangible, bodiless substance of sound, and renders it into concrete, physical reality.

Schoenberg’s image of the composer as a carpenter selecting appropriate pieces of wood accesses a dialogue of musical craftsmanship which extends as far back the Middle Ages, when modern notions of originality and “creation” would have been unrecognizable. Music as craft (Handwerk) implies a certain working-with-scratch-materials through which the invisible substance of sound is conceptualized as physical, malleable material. Informed by the writings of the Greeks, the intellectual culture of the Middle Ages viewed the creative process as an act not of generating from nothing (ex nihilo), but of fashioning something from pre-existing resources. Plato’s Timaeus takes the substance of the world as its object of inquiry and concludes that the world is shaped from an unlimited source of formless pre-existing materia. To scholars of the


11 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 7. To readers of Schoenberg’s treatise, the comparison of the carpenter to the music theorist may stand out as a striking contradiction. Throughout the text, Schoenberg takes pains to demonstrate that the theorist is nothing like the carpenter because he does not practice the art. However, the opening remarks of Chapter 1 explain that the composition instructor is commonly referred to as a theory teacher. Thus, we might best interpret Schoenberg’s use of “music theorist” in this passage to mean composition teacher, which is better indicative of the master carpenter persona which he assumes.
early Common Era, Plato’s notion of “unformed, unlimited, matter” was best reconceptualized materially as a “forest” *(silva)*, a veritable thicket of wood, brush, and other materials of nature that could be chosen from and shaped to meet the craftsman’s purpose.\(^\text{12}\)

This forest *(silva)* of pre-existing substance became a useful metaphor for dealing with the more abstract realities of time, motion, and thought. In the same manner in which the craftsman cuts and secures his pieces of wood into identifiable features *(figurae)*, so as to connote the purpose and usefulness of his product *(artificialis)*, the orator might piece together his thoughts and words, step-by-step, into a coherent progression of ideas. Similarly, the medieval composer might draw from the repository of chant melodies *(cantus)* to piece together, chunk-by-chunk, the movements of a mass, an activity one late thirteenth-century Parisian writer equates to the craft of shoemaking.\(^\text{13}\) Characterized by Augustine as the “science of moving well,”\(^\text{14}\) music likewise deals with the unseen materials of motion, sound, and time, and thus held within early Christian education a firm place as an exemplary discipline within the liberal arts. When Schoenberg instructs his pupils to “fashion a close” to artfully “shape” a modulation, or to select an appropriate piece of wood to fashion a theme,\(^\text{15}\) he appropriates a centuries-old equivalence of unseen with seen substance, both of which could be fashioned in the same way.

The polemic that is Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre* is founded in this discourse of musical craftsmanship. In Chapter 2, I introduce the ways in which Schoenberg uses the language of craft to reaffirm the authority of the composer over the sound material of his practice—to present the


natural properties of sound and the possibilities of its treatment as a contrast to what theory and aesthetics would establish as the so-called eternal laws of art. As author of the treatise, Schoenberg assumes the role of “master carpenter,” (Tischlermeister) whose teaching “rests on observation, experience, reasoning, and taste, on knowledge of natural laws and of the requirements of the material.”16 Schoenberg as master carpenter serves as mediator between the student and the tradition, for “Were the pupil able to extract from the musical literature what he needs for composing, then no one would have to teach harmony.”17 In doing so, he emphasizes both his practical experience as a composer and his “firsthand,” “steady contemplation” of music, and, contrarily, he de-emphasizes any reliance on harmonic theory or other pre-formed knowledge, remarking blithely, “As a musician who did not collect his knowledge by reading, but who may rather characterize what he offers as the results of his own thought about his experiences in teaching and composing, I presumably have the right not to be fettered by the citation of sources customary in scholarly works.”18

The image of the master craftsman serves as an indicator (figura) of honorable character traits and a specific type of knowledge (unseen substance) expressed in the writings of Aristotle. When Schoenberg assumes the persona of master carpenter, he is thus entering into a metaphysical discourse intended to affirm his authority as arbiter over sound material, as experienced tradesman and guide, and as teacher, one who, having reasoned for himself, understands the nature of the material and the most effective means of its treatment. In the

16 Ibid., 7.
17 Ibid., 15.
18 Ibid., 16. Schoenberg’s proclaimed independence is informed by previous theories to a greater extent than he acknowledges.
Aristotle uses the analogy of the master craftsman as exemplary of inner human substance such as knowledge, wisdom, experience, and honor:

. . . we also think the master craftsmen in each kind of work are more honorable and know more than the manual laborers, and are also wiser, because they know the causes of the things they do, as though people are wiser not as a result of being skilled at action, but as a result of themselves having the reasoned account and knowing the causes. And in general, a sign of the one who knows and the one who does not is being able to teach, and for this reason we regard the art, more than the experience, to be knowledge, since the ones can, but the others cannot, teach.19

The first chapter of the *Metaphysics* is an attempt by Aristotle to distinguish between different types of knowledge. Experience is a type of knowledge acquired through perception, physical imitation, and memory—in short, by *doing*. Aristotle places experience among the lowest type of knowledge, that knowledge belonging to the day laborers. Absent of reason, it is a type of knowledge that is almost instinctual to man and to some higher adaptations of animals. For, as Aristotle explains in his *Poetics*, “Imitation is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation.”20 In contrast, the master craftsman exemplifies a type of knowledge acquired not only through experience and practice, but also through inquiry and reason. On account of having reasoned, the master craftsman understands the cause behind his work and the nature of his materials, whereas the manual laborers “do not pick out the why of anything, such as why fire is hot, but only that it is hot.”21 Schoenberg’s self-identification as the master craftsman draws on a *topos* extending back to the foundations of Western thought. The *figura* of the master craftsman connotes a specific type of knowledge. He is a source of wisdom


whose breadth of experience is informed and made authoritative by means of steady, rational contemplation.

Music shares with knowledge the property of being unseen and thus served as an exemplary discipline. The treatises of Augustine and Boethius contain metaphysical dialogues in which music is placed side-by-side with the working crafts \textit{\(artes\ mechanicae\)}. Both writers use the image of the performer \textit{(cantor)} as a signifier \textit{(figura)} of mere practical experience: the type of knowledge comparable to Aristotle’s day laborer and indistinguishable between man and some animals. The performer exhibits “knowledge belonging to the lowest animals,” writes Augustine in his \textit{De Musica}, for, just as the flute player is capable of producing pleasing music through sense, imitation, and memory, the nightingale, through its instinct, can sing in a pleasing way and according to the season.\textsuperscript{22} The performer of music represents a type of practical knowledge, even skill: “For I am always hearing how even doctors, very learned men, in the matter of amputating or binding limbs, are often surpassed by less clever men in their use of the hand or knife.”\textsuperscript{23} Augustine holds that the true musician is the man who has a rational account of its properties. Just as the wood worker is able to strike a single place with an axe repeatedly, the performer \textit{(cantor)} may exhibit a type of physical dexterity that is understood, but not practiced by he who has reasoned, Nevertheless, their “speed and facility of moving . . . is to be attributed to practice rather than science.”\textsuperscript{24} Taking pains to emphasize music as a science, Augustine views the true musician \textit{(musicus)} as he who understands the ways in which a composition is put together.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{St. Augustine on Music}, 15.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
Augustine’s discourse identifies a third category of knowledge delineated by Aristotle in the opening chapter of the *Metaphysics*—a type of universal wisdom acquired by the man of leisure who, because his basic necessities are met, has the time to inquire of and understand the nature of many arts. It is arguable that Boethius recalls Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* explicitly in his *De institutione musica* when he equates the type of knowledge exhibited by the former specifically to the working crafts. Like Augustine, Boethius considers the craftsman and performer as representative of a type of practical knowledge, of a skill set reserved best for “servitude”:

Now one should bear in mind that every art and also every discipline considers reason inherently more honorable than a skill which is practiced by the hand and the labor of an artisan. For it is much better and nobler to know about what someone else fashions than to execute that about which someone else knows; in fact, physical skill serves as a slave, while reason rules like a mistress. Unless the hand acts according to the will of reason, it acts in vain. How much nobler, then, is the study of music as a rational discipline than as composition and performance! It is as much nobler as the mind is superior to the body; for devoid of reason, one remains in servitude.\(^{25}\)

Boethius distinguishes between the performer, the composer, and the musician, concluding that, on account of having “gained knowledge of making music by weighing with the reason, not through the servitude of work, but through the sovereignty of speculation,”\(^{26}\) the man of leisure is the true musician. The composer, the poet, like Augustine’s nightingale, rely on instinct, not reason, and thus, like the performer, is excluded from the type of higher, more honorable knowledge that, “since it is totally grounded in reason and thought, will rightly be esteemed as musical.”\(^{27}\)


\(^{26}\) Ibid., 51.

\(^{27}\) Ibid.
We must be careful to differentiate between Aristotle’s figure of the master carpenter and the types of laborers capable of completing repetitive tasks well depicted in the passages of Augustine and Boethius. Neither of these writers provide a figura equivalent to the kind of practical, yet rational knowledge exemplified by the master carpenter. Rather, they distinguish between only musica prattica, which, as a laborer’s discipline, they hold among the lowest types of knowledge, and music as a science and contemplative art, the understanding of which cultivates the intellect by providing insight into the unseen properties of sound, time, and motion. For, Aristotle maintains that the highest type of knowledge is that which is “directed at neither pleasure nor necessity,” the type of knowledge reflective of nobleness, wisdom and honor, and to which the man of leisure should thus strive.\textsuperscript{28}

In contrast, Schoenberg has little patience for what he considered to be speculation. And his Harmonielehre is largely an attempt to reclaim the authority of the composer over his material, his art, and the cultural musical discourse from those who only talk and do not do. In his opening chapter, Schoenberg reinterprets and overturns Aristotle’s tripartite metaphysical discourse, reserving his most stinging invective not for performers (or whatever he would consider the equivalent of Aristotle’s day laborers), but for theorists: the unproductive. “A carpenter will never think of setting himself up as a theory teacher,” Schoenberg remarks wryly:

\textellipsis the carpenter could never understand his craft in a merely theoretical way, whereas the usual music theorist has no practical skill at all – he is no master. And still another distinction: the true music theorist is embarrassed by the handicraft because it is not his, but that of others. Merely to hide his embarrassment without making a virtue of it does not satisfy him. The title, master, is beneath him. He could be taken for something else, \textellipsis the nobler profession must be designated by a correspondingly nobler title. For this reason, although even today the great artist is still addressed as ‘master’, music does not simply have instruction in its craft, its techniques – as does painting; music has, rather, Instruction in Theory.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{28} [981b 22] Aristotle’s Metaphysics, 3.

\textsuperscript{29} Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 7.
Schoenberg’s passage recalls the type of knowledge differentiated by Aristotle’s master carpenter, and that “nobler” knowledge which belongs to the leisure classes. The master craftsman understands the theoretical, natural, and physical principles behind his work, and his hands-on experience and artistry warrants the title, “master.” Theorists, Schoenberg asserts, attempt to claim an authority over an art which does not belong to them by identifying their knowledge as theory, as liberal knowledge not dependent on an immediate useful purpose and useful for its own sake. But their adoption of the title “theorist” is merely semantic. More troubling for Schoenberg is the attempt of theory to assume authority over the practice of composition by establishing and policing laws of a pre-ordained system (see Chapter 2 of this dissertation).

It is the *inexperience* of the aestheticians which agitates Schoenberg. Concerned with frivolous notions of beauty, the aesthetcian does not take into account the practical demands of the material. Again, Schoenberg draws on a dialogue of craftsmanship, this time to illuminate his own aesthetic position:

I once sketched out a plan for a music stand and showed it to a carpenter. It was to have two columns, held together by heavy wooden braces. I had imagined the heavy wooden braces would be beautiful (beautiful!). The carpenter, a Czech, who could not even speak good German, said: ‘No good carpenter will make that for you. We learned that a connecting piece must be lighter than a column.’ I was thoroughly shamed. I had considered beautiful what was simply impractical, and a carpenter who understood his craft could of course throw out this beauty without hesitation. Of course: material sparingly used! That is, indeed, artistic economy; only such means to be used as are absolutely necessary for producing a certain effect.\(^\text{30}\)

Influenced by the artistic philosophies and writings of the Viennese Secession, such as the architect Adolf Loos’ essay “Ornament and Crime” (1908), Schoenberg consistently returns to an ancillary discourse in which he criticizes what he sees in the prevailing tonal aesthetic as an

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 270.
overemphasis on adornment. “The most radical artistic and literary minds in pre-War Vienna were constantly preoccupied with opposing the decadence of expression,” writes Musgrave, “which they associated with empty stylistic imitation and useless ornament, the disguising of the lack of any real substance.” 31 In his 1922 revision, Schoenberg has harsh words for the “bookbinders’ love of ornament,” likewise appealing to craftsmanship to better articulate his aesthetic position, and laments the practice of replacing quality, hand-sewn stitching with more decorative, but lower quality bindings. 32 The anecdote of his encounter with the Czech carpenter illustrates his own inexperience with actual woodwork. His preconceptions of beauty were but trivial fancies to the “honorable and skilled carpenter” who understood the practicalities of his materials through his first-hand experience. 33

Schoenberg finds value in a type of knowledge that one can acquire only through the type of experience exhibited by the Czech carpenter. The carpenter takes into account the most effective, practical means of his material, whereas the laws of theory are at best the sophomoric explanations of textbooks. For example, the ability to modulate quickly to distantly related keys is a product of “the examination room, where haste is necessary.” 34 Likely referring to Richter’s Lehrbuch (see Chapter 2 of this study), Schoenberg speaks of a “highly esteemed harmony text” which presents secondary and diminished-seventh chords as a means to modulate quickly to all keys. He who has experience, though, understands that the quickest means of modulation does not ensure the most effective use of the material. “One can reach the street faster by leaping from the fifth floor than by going down the stairs – but in what condition! Thus it is not a matter of the

32 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 344n.
33 Ibid., 270.
34 Ibid., 269.
shortest way but of the practical, the appropriate way.”

The composer does well when, by effectively using inversions to gain access to a variety of shades and strengths of a single chord, he follows the lead of the Czech carpenter’ emphasis on “artistic economy.” Similarly, “harmonic richness does not come about by going through a great many keys, but by making the richest possible use of the degrees. In this sense a chorale of Bach is harmonically richer than most modern compositions.”

Schoenberg’s invective against theory is not so much a diatribe against the type of leisurely knowledge esteemed by Aristotle, Augustine, and Boethius as it is an attempt to reclaim his authority as teacher and composer from those unproductive who are not content to understand better the nature of the art, but who stubbornly profess the laws to which new art should conform:

It observes a number of phenomena, classifies them according to some common characteristics, and then derives laws from them. That is of course correct procedure, because unfortunately there is hardly any other way. But now begins the error. For it is falsely concluded that these laws, since apparently correct with regard to the phenomena previously observed, must then surely hold for all future phenomena as well. And, what is most disastrous of all, it is then the belief that a yardstick has been found by which to measure artistic worth, even that of future works.

Schoenberg reasons that his experience as a composer makes him more suited to teach than the theorist who is not a composer. “Theory cannot and may not take the lead; it should affirm, describe, compare, and organize.” While Schoenberg holds theorists such as Schenker and Riemann with high regard, he often finds fault with their logic.

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35 Ibid., 165.
36 Ibid., 55.
37 Ibid., 370; emphasis in original.
38 Ibid., 8; italics in original.
39 Ibid., 345.
Schoenberg believes that theory has come to false conclusions, and is troubled that these conclusions continue to be transmitted second-hand through the tracts and textbooks. Much that assumes the title of “theory” is no longer centered in the act of logic. Theory no longer seeks to explain the reasons why, for instance, parallel fifths and octaves are excluded from the system, any more than Aristotle’s day laborer understands the reasons why fire is hot. And Schoenberg derides theory’s appeal to aesthetics as unreasoned:

These judgments, ‘beautiful’ or ‘not beautiful’, are entirely gratuitous excursions into aesthetics and have noting to do with the logic of the whole. Parallel fifths sound bad (why?). This passing note sounds harsh (why?). There are no such things as ninth chords, or they sound harsh (why?). Where in the system can we find logical, mutually consistent answers to these three ‘why’s’?  

Schoenberg demonstrates that theory’s “law” against parallel and hidden fifths and octaves is over-simplistic and unfounded, a second-hand “phantom of the textbooks.” And he appeals to both reason and experience to demystify the stigma of theory against them. It is easily deduced that parallel fifths and octaves are in accord with the nature of the material, for each tone has rising above it the overtone series in which the octave and the fifth are the first two tones to appear. Parallel motion is thus an inherent feature of any movement from one pitch to the next, as is demonstrated by what he considers to be “primitive” imitations of organum. Thus, parallel fifths and octaves cannot be tossed out of the system on account of their inconsistency with nature. But even if their use is “outmoded,” they still frequently appear in the literature as doublings. The simplistic notion, derived from aesthetics, that they “sound bad” is not founded in reason, for doublings are designed specifically to obtain a certain artistic effect. Moreover, the experience acquired through study and imitation of the masterworks demonstrates that rule

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40 Ibid., 10.
41 Ibid., 69.
42 Ibid., 68.
against hidden fifths “has been more often violated than observed”\textsuperscript{43}—the cadence, for instance, in which the bass ascends from So to Do and the soprano ascends from Ti to Do. Ultimately, Schoenberg reasons, it is the strongest and most economic treatment of the material to avoid hidden fifths and octaves in three- or four-voice counterpoint, but the demands of the material and the situation sometimes allow for, even dictate, their occurrence. Deriving his teaching from his observations of the literature, Schoenberg is concerned more with writing about music than he is with putting forth theoretical principles.

Schoenberg assumes the image of Aristotle’s master carpenter by purporting to begin afresh, to teach the craft of composition from the standpoint of the material rather than by second-hand presumptions, and to work from his own logical deductions of the demands of the material. His entry into an ancient metaphysical discourse is an attempt to demonstrate his authority as teacher, but also to reclaim the authority of the modern composer over his material—an objective that has the ulterior motive of justifying his own harmonic approach. It is through his experience treating the material and his knowledge and understanding of the harmonic series, the physical properties of the tone, that Schoenberg provides his strongest retort to theory’s assumptions of a hierarchical relationship between consonance and dissonance.

Chapter 2 of the current study demonstrates the ways in which Schoenberg centeres his own “theory” of an emancipated dissonance in natural laws. Schoenberg insists that dissonance occurs naturally in the overtones of the harmonic series and thus should not be subjected to the requirements of culture. As craftsman, he meets the challenge of articulating this ideal through his hands-on experience with the material. “[A]n important principle of the handicraft,” Schoenberg writes, is “to make characteristic use of the strengths and shortcomings of the

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., 69; emphasis in original.
material at hand.”\textsuperscript{44} The wise and honorable craftsman takes in mind the strengths of his material when he approaches it from an economical perspective, such as when he makes use of inversions and the many chromatic alterations available to one scale degree. But the craftsman also understands the shortcomings of his material. Again drawing on a personal anecdote, Schoenberg recalls the experience of dropping his new, “modern” pocket watch. In his own aesthetic dismissal of ornament, Schoenberg had purchased a watch with no engravings, no ornament. Its surfaces were crafted too smoothly, and the watch slipped from his hands. “Then I understood that the casing of my old watch was engraved so that, because of its fairly rough surface, it would be easier to hold on to.”\textsuperscript{45} The practical demands of the material precluded Schoenberg’s own aesthetic inclinations. The engravings of the watch were a functional necessity that he only became aware of through his experience.

It is the limitations of the material that serves as a foundation for the system of tonality. Schoenberg reasons that early composers would have been conscious of certain intonation difficulties when writing for voices \textit{a cappella}. The system arising from the predication that dissonance must resolve, Schoenberg hypothesizes, was merely the result of their efforts to account for the difficulties of performing dissonance in tune:

> The performers, professional singers or amateurs, sang their parts mostly at sight, without much rehearsal. This practice of sight-singing in performance was the precondition to which everything else was adapted. To write well for voices meant then, above all, to avoid difficulties where possible. And since the singer, unlike the instrumentalist, does not have fixed tones . . . certain intervals, even today, offer him intonation difficulties.\textsuperscript{46}

> “How do I introduce the singer to sing a dissonant tone in spite of himself, in spite of possible intonation difficulties? I do not let him notice its entry and I whisper to him in

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 344n.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 45.
the catastrophic moment: ‘Easy! It’s practically over.’ Careful introduction and
euphonious resolution: that is the system!”

The crux of tonality is the movement to and resolution of dissonance, which conveys
harmonically motion and repose. Such a foundation was established, Schoenberg reasons, by
meeting the demands and limitations of the material. The tone may contain in itself the inchoate
substance (*silva*) that makes available to the craftsman all intervallic possibilities. But the
material of the human voice, as the medium through which to deliver such intervals, and the
attunement of the ear to the more remote overtones, had not progressed enough to account for
and perform these possibilities well. Thus, Schoenberg suggests, in a time when technological
advancement had produced instruments capable of performing greater intervallic possibilities in
tune and without the aid of preparation and resolution, these aids, purported to be laws, are
exposed as crutches which only impede the advancement of art.

II. From Craftsman to Searcher: the Composer’s “Sense of Form”

However exhaustive and useful his discourse of craftsmanship, both pedagogically and
polemically, Schoenberg nonetheless makes a distinction between the composer-craftsman and
the true artist. His instructions in the *Harmonielehre* begin with strict adherence to guidelines
dealing with simpler harmonic resources. But as the resources become richer, Schoenberg
gradually loosens his restrictions; in the final few chapters of the treatise, Schoenberg
relinquishes his position as instructor, leaving the pupil to deal with the most advanced
harmonies with only “His ear and his sense of integrity” as guide.

Correspondingly, Schoenberg’s presentation of composition as honorable craftsmanly activity gradually wanes.

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47 Ibid., 49.

48 Ibid., 413.
The dialogue of craft is supplanted by one of artistic restlessness. Whereas the craftsman embraces the materials and models before him, the true artist, never content with the “found” musical resources, forges ahead. In the remainder of this chapter, I examine Schoenberg’s discourse of artistic restlessness. I find that, as Schoenberg increasingly equates that which is New to positive inner traits such as truth, beauty, and knowledge, his identity as author shifts from learned and experienced artisan to artistic truth-seeker, a transformation I trace in his discussion of musical models. The composer-craftsman learns primarily through his study and imitation of the masterworks, but the artist, as philosopher and seeker, possesses an internal, unseen model which guides his creative impulse. Consequently, as Schoenberg turns increasingly inward to the models and spiritual substance of his inner consciousness, the concept of composition in Harmonielehre becomes more than an act of placing tones together; the art of composition is an act of contemplation, the production of knowledge, and an act of discovery, the production of harmonic resources.

The craft of composition deals with the means of shaping the material of sound, time, and motion. And the material of sound is the tone. Artifice begins when the craftsman starts to fashion his material after an external stimulus—to imitate an object or model. For Schoenberg, the similarities between harmonic practice and the pattern of overtones existing freely and naturally above a sounding pitch are more than conspicuous. Consequently, the tone is not just the material of music, Schoenberg insists, but also the “natural model” after which the musical craftsman shapes sound substance. Musical material in its simplest arrangement (artificialis) imitates the harmonic series vertically, as in the major triad, and horizontally, as in the diatonic scale. In his chapter on the major triad and diatonic chords, Schoenberg draws a comparison

49 Ibid., 19-20.  
50 Ibid., 23.
between the triad and Assyrian reliefs, for, unlike music, sculpture is an art which makes use of physical materials and visible models. The relief is a type of sculpture in which an artist selects his material, such as a piece of stone, and chisels away excess material so as to fashion an image that rises above the stone surface. Just as Assyrian reliefs are modeled on natural, external stimuli such as human features, Schoenberg suggests, the triad is arranged in the likeness of the first five tones of the harmonic series.

In his task of putting tones together, the composer is thus guided first by the inherent properties of the material. The historical development of harmony, Schoenberg reasons, is informed by its conformity to the harmonic series, whether composers were conscious of this imitation or not. For instance, just as its influence shapes the triad, the harmonic series regulates the craftsman’s treatment of the chord in second inversion. The 6/4 chord is a larger, more dissonant complex than its sounding parts, for the chordal root and third of the harmony are sounding above and in conflict with the natural overtone series of the bass. The resolution of the sounding pitches is a result of the will of the bass tone to assert its own overtones, a will strong enough that its treatment in the literature had become almost cliché.\(^{51}\) Similarly, to take an example from Schoenberg’s closing chapter, the modern compositions of his time exhibit an imitation of the harmonic series not too far removed from that of the triad:

Generally, in the use of chords with six or more tones, there will appear the tendency to soften the dissonance through wide spacing of the individual chord tones. That such is a softening is obvious. For the image of what the dissonances actually are, more remote overtones, is imitated in a satisfying way.\(^{52}\)

Using an example from the *Erwartung* for soprano and orchestra, Op. 17 (1909), one of the few occasions for which he takes his own work as an example, Schoenberg notates an 11-tone

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\(^{51}\) Ibid., 75-76, and 143-44.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 417-418.
harmonic structure spanning over five octaves. It is not a precise imitation of the harmonic
series, but its wide intervallic spacing in the bass voices and the gradual narrowing between
voices sounding at higher frequencies does imitate the intervallic pattern of the natural overtones.
Just as he considers dissonance a matter of degree, Schoenberg views the increasingly complex
harmonies of the “ultramoderns” to be arranged from the same type of natural imitation that
produces the triad. As an external model, the harmonic series exhibits a pattern and an inherent
set of principles which influence the simplest imitation of the major triad, the “clichéd” treatment
of the triad in second in version, and the larger complexes of modern harmony.

In order to fashion musical material appropriately and effectively, the composer is guided
likewise by the model and influence of the musical past. Schoenberg’s polemic is tireless in its
effort to place the “living example” of the masterworks above theoretical laws, aesthetic
presumptions, or compositional prescriptions. At the same time that he reasserts the authority
of the contemporary composer as arbiter of musical substance, Schoenberg reemphasizes the
master composers of the past as authoritative models for the treatment of the materials at a time
when various Lehren on music were becoming prolific. One need think only of J.S. Bach’s many
pedagogical keyboard collections—for example, the Orgelbüchlein (c. 1708-1714), the title page
of which reads, “(48 realized chorales), In which a beginner at the organ is given instruction in
developing a chorale in many divers ways,” the Well-Tempered Clavier (Part 1 complied 1722)
“For the use and profit of the musical youth desirous of learning,” and the Inventions and
Sinfonias (compiled 1723) “to learn to play clearly in two voices . . . ; furthermore, at the same
time not alone to have good inventiones . . . and at the same time to acquire a strong foretaste of
composition”—as exemplary of a music education in which emulation was central to the

53 Ibid., 8 and 90.
formative experience of the composer-apprentice. Writing in 1606, the German composer and theorist Joachim Burmeister identified twelve composers, including Orlando di Lasso, Jacobus Regnart, and Johann Dressler, “after whose example we should strive to fashion something similar.” And Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart once exclaimed, “People are mistaken, if they think that my art has come easy to me. I assure you, dear friend, no one has devoted so much effort in the study of composition as have I. There is scarcely a famous master in music whose works I have not diligently, and often repeatedly, studied.”

Put more plainly, composition, like all craft, is an art cultivated primarily through the study and imitation of musical models. The works of the past constitute a body of knowledge of and experience with dealing with sound substance from which the craftsman refines his technique, his treatment of the natural materials. Always critical of theory, Schoenberg provides examples drawn from the literature to refute restrictions against parallel and hidden fifths and octaves, unresolved dissonances, and similar “laws” of theory. And he cites his Verklärte Nacht, Op. 4 (1899) to challenge Schenker’s conclusions that there are no ninth chords, that the ninth cannot appear in the bass voice. But most often, Schoenberg reprises his role as master carpenter, drawing on his own careful study of the literature to provide the pupil useful guidelines concerning the most effective treatment of the material. “Experience teaches” that four-part writing in close position provides a sense of balance, Schoenberg writes, and the composer-


apprentice will find plenty of examples in the literature if that is the effect that he wishes to obtain.\textsuperscript{57} Similarly, the cadence is most effective when the harmonies progress from dominant to tonic, as exemplified in the literature, whereas the III-I and VII-I progressions are “not in common practice today.”\textsuperscript{58} Perhaps the most striking example of Schoenberg’s presentation of the musical past as a model is his recommendation that the pupil “copy a theme from Beethoven, Mozart, or Brahms, . . . harmonize it, and then compare with the original.”\textsuperscript{59} Schoenberg as mediator between the natural and cultural models offers his treatise as merely a helpful guide, a timesaver authored by the “sure and careful hand” of one who has given his full attention to the masterworks of the past that will allow the student to produces something “which in its materials and techniques resembles older compositions.”\textsuperscript{60} True instruction in composition takes place when the student invests himself in the study of musical models, and Schoenberg fills the pages of Harmonielehre with the names of exemplary former and contemporary Austro-German master composers: Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, Wagner, Mahler, Strauss, Reger, and Pfitzner.

It could easily go unsaid that Schoenberg did not view the imitation of past musical works as a prescription for composing. Chapter 2 of this study details the ways in which Schoenberg refutes laws derived from the musical past as prerequisites for composition, and I have attempted to show above that Schoenberg viewed the masterworks of music as useful guides for the treatment and arrangement of sound material. Still, the teachings of some of Schoenberg’s contemporaries present a clear antithesis to what Schoenberg sought to attain.

\textsuperscript{57} Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 36.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 134. The V-I cadence is also sanctioned in nature as the strongest cadence because the fundamental of V gravitates to the fundamental of I. The first overtone of the harmonic series is fifth. Thus, the strongest progression of the root will always be a fifth below.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 288.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 94, 11.
through his study of the musical past. Composers have always used pre-existing models for the
cultivation of their own compositional technique. But under the direction of Hermann Grädener
and Robert Fuchs, composition instruction at the Vienna Conservatory at the turn of the century
reached a degree of exactness in its imitations of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century
Viennese masterworks that bordered on what Margaret Notley characterizes as “classicizing
formulae.” One former student of the Conservatory recalls the preciseness to which pupils were
expected to imitate their models:

Many teachers went so far as to require composing exactly according to certain Classical
eamples. Thus a theory teacher in Vienna once gave the assignment of composing a
piano sonata after the model of the Spring Sonata, with even the same number of
measures, only the key should be C minor! It was not Schoenberg’s intent that his pupils replicate compositions such as Beethoven’s Violin
Sonata, written over one-hundred years earlier. The Harmonielehre provides strikingly few
actual musical examples drawn from the literature. Such instruction imparts merely the type of
knowledge corresponding to the person who is good with repetitive tasks but has no inclination
to understand why he does something, and thus bears little influence on the student’s abilities to
-compose music: “The means of art, . . . all those characteristics of which the mediocre believe it
is only necessary that they imitate them and they too will become artists – all these things turn
out to be secondary matters.” Schoenberg identifies a corollary to the musical craftsman, that of

61 Margaret Notley, “Musical Culture in Vienna at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” in Schoenberg,
Greenwood Press, 1999), 54.

62 Felix Petyrek, “Franz Schreker als Lehrer,” Musikblatter des Anbruch 10 (1928): 113, quoted in Notley,
“Musical Culture in Vienna,” 54.

63 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 413.
the true artist, and he regards technical facility, acquired partly through imitation, as subsidiary
to the act of art: “the artist has something to say other than his technique.”

In 1911, the same year that he completed the first edition of his Harmonielehre, Schoenberg wrote an essay entitled “Problems in Teaching Art.” Here, Schoenberg makes the distinction between art and craft explicit, piecing together a discourse otherwise scattered among the many other technical, aesthetic and speculative dialogues throughout the Harmonielehre. The main difference, Schoenberg insists, is that the true artist communicates “Not other people’s thoughts,” but “his own”:

This ability to express oneself differs fundamentally from the craftsman’s ability, which in fact really expresses someone other than himself. The craftsman can make what the artist had to create. With his dexterity and adaptability he can apply, as an artistic method, something the creative spirit did unconsciously, when it forced from the material the effects that matched a need for expression.

The passage summarizes what Schoenberg likewise expresses in the Harmonielehre to be the attributes of art. Art differs considerably from craftsmanship in that it expresses the unseen, spiritual substance of individuality. The composer’s mastery of established artistic means contributes little to his effectiveness as an artist, for “You don’t have technique when you can neatly imitate something; technique has you. Other people’s technique.” Art is an act above all of individual expression. It is also an act of creation. “The function of the creative artist consists in making laws,” writes Schoenberg’s correspondent, Ferruccio Busoni, “not in following laws [al]ready made. He who follows such laws, ceases to be a creator.”

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64 Ibid., 396.
66 Ibid., 366.
devices at the craftsman’s disposal are first the products of one artist’s compulsion to re-shape the materials apart from the established models and in accord with his individual expressive obligations. The evolution of musical resources is thus dependent on art. The craftsman makes no original contribution to the literature when he produces something that merely resembles in its technique the works of the past. Art produces knowledge; and in the *Harmonielehre*, Schoenberg characterizes composition as an act comparable to scientific and philosophical discovery.

Acquiring technical facility is thus a byproduct of the study and imitation of the masterworks, which Schoenberg values instead as a means through which to cultivate the composer’s inner consciousness. The craftsman of music has two external models after which he can shape sound substance effectively. The natural harmonic complex that is the overtone series lends itself as a model for structuring harmonies, for instance, the triad, just as any physical object exhibits features, patterns, and images reproduced in painting and sculpture. The literature of the musical past offers the composer-craftsman a second model. He learns to shape the material appropriately and effectively when he emulates the ways that master composers for generations have worked with and fashioned sound substance. However, “the work of the truly gifted” is not a process of rearranging musical substance, and “ultimately manifests very little external relationship with the literature that was once [its] model.”

The student’s assimilation of the literature compiles an mass of impressions which shapes and influences his creative palette. Should he have the courage to follow his raw instincts, the true artist is capable of producing something which displays only implicit indebtedness to the models of the past.

Familiarity with the masterworks is requisite to composition not merely because they provide a model for treating sound substance, but because they are at work in the subconscious impulses of the artistic spirit. “The artist must study, must learn, whether he wants to or not. . . .

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In his instinct, in his unconscious lies a wealth of old knowledge, which he will resurrect whether he wants to or not.” 69 We are reminded of medieval concept of *silva*, a “forest” of pre-existing substance signifying both physical and unseen material to be drawn from and shaped at the will of the artisan. The student is filling his spiritual and intellectual woodshed, his repository of inner materials, when he effectively emulates, assesses critically, and assimilates the resources and technical knowledge preserved in the literature of the musical past. The materials to be fashioned are no longer outward models, but, rather, inner impressions, forged in the subconscious, to which the composer’s technique can only serve as a scribe.

Such intuitive expression drives the development of art. Schoenberg reasons that the harmonic resources presented in musical models are first the products of the inherent musical consciousness of the composer, as seen no more clearly than in his consideration of quartal harmonies as the “spiritual property” of Debussy. 70

The fourth chords make their first appearance in music as an impressionistic means of expression, as does apparently everything that later becomes a commonly used technical means. Consider, for example, the effect of the violin tremolo the first time it was used; it then becomes clear that such did not come about as a dispassionate technical experiment, rather as a sudden inspiration evoked by a powerful expressive urge. 71

Just as Schoenberg likens the harmonic innovations of Wagner to a sort of naïve artistic spirit—the product of “youthful sounds . . . ; pure feeling, with no trace of an awareness,” 72—he similarly attributes Debussy’s advanced harmonic palette to an inward artistic compulsion. Further, the artist’s discoveries, produced from his instinctive impulses, become in the hands of his imitators nothing more than the technical devices. The distinction between the artist and the

69 Ibid., 416.
70 Ibid., 403.
71 Ibid., 399-400.
72 Ibid., 401.
craftsman lies in the artist’s action of attuning to and obeying the sound structures of his inner consciousness. Whereas the craftsman fashions from the pre-existing sound vocabularies preserved in the literature, the artist follows the dictates of his musical inspiration: “And in this instinct the old may find expression, and the new.”

Harmony instruction (Harmonielehre) is instruction in craft; it is instruction in fitting together individual tones to construct chords, and it is instruction in connecting chords. Likewise Kontrapunktlehre and Formlehre deal with the intricacies of placing together individual parts and with the organization of motivic-thematic chunks. It is not insignificant that Schoenberg considers each of these types of instruction as prefatory to composition, and not simply because each isolates a manner of fashioning musical material which the craftsman ultimately deals with to produce an artwork. Instruction in harmony is not instruction in composition because the true composer of music, the true artist, is responsible only to his ear and impressions: “instruction that is supposed to educate an artist could consist at most in helping him to listen to himself. Technique, the means of art, will not help him.”

The Harmonielehre of Schoenberg is above all a text concerned with the cultivation of inner substance, what he repeatedly refers to as the composer’s Formgefühl, his “sense of form.” Schoenberg’s method is designed not simply to relay to the student the preformed knowledge dealing with harmony; it is intended to cultivate the inner traits of reason, inquisitive restlessness for the purpose of cultivating his awareness of and finer attunement to his spiritual and intellectual instincts.

In the final evaluation, Schoenberg’s emphasis on musical models—the masters and their masterworks—gives the student the tools to shape his musical ideas, but also facilitates his capacity for critical thought and reason. As late as the 1940s, when Schoenberg was teaching

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73 Ibid., 416.

74 Ibid., 413.
undergraduates in Southern California, his approach to the analysis of masterworks remained one of cultivating the spirit and intellect through inquiry, contemplation, and discovery:

For students, the majority of whom could not be expected to approach the heights of true creativity, the analysis of masterworks . . . would serve to point up the qualitative differences between the imaginative solutions of the genius and their own modest exercises. Even more important, comprehension and appreciation of an ideal represented by great achievements of the past went beyond training in composition to form part of a moral education that developed the whole personality.\(^{75}\)

Reason and intellect are emphasized in the *Harmonielehre*, as is the notion that the student will rarely master his material in a way represented by the great composers of the past. After the pupil harmonizes his selected theme by Mozart, Beethoven, or Brahms (see above), for instance, “it should be clear to him that his harmonization is inferior to that of the model, and he should now try to discover why that is so.”\(^{76}\) This type of comparative emulation is a sharp contrast to the strict imitations demanded by the faculty of the Vienna Conservatory, which presumably required that the student reproduce the thematic structure of Beethoven’s *Spring Sonata* to the measure. Schoenberg’s instructions imply critical reflection and honesty. The student learns not simply to compose a theme in the likeness of Beethoven’s work, but instead, rationalizes the reasons for himself why the master composers shape the material more effectively.

For similar reasons, Schoenberg foregoes exercises in figured bass, the normal basis for harmony instruction. Instead, from their earliest attempts to connect one diatonic chord to the next, students are to determine for themselves the series of harmonies. Schoenberg reasons that such instruction both cultivates the pupil’s ear, allowing the student to become attuned to the “individualities” of the harmonic resources, and stimulates his creative energies in that, “from


the very beginning the pupil is himself, in a certain sense, composing.” The student is not yet left entirely to his own artistic capacity. Schoenberg provides questions to consider when connecting triads:

1. Which tone is the root?
2. Which is the common tone?
3. Which tones are still missing?

Designed to facilitate the student’s task of working through the problems of connecting chords, the questions also cultivate a certain deductive logic in the student. As the text progresses and the harmonic resources become richer, the list of questions becomes longer. The pupil acquires dexterity in his craftsmanship when he learns to identify quickly the individual parts of a progression and proceeds systematically through the process of working out their complications in the most efficient manner. Schoenberg insists that the student actually ask and answer the questions as he works through his progressions. The questions are an intellectual exercise, and their repetition is intended to cultivate the student’s awareness of his compositional decisions to a degree that it becomes instinctual. Such a procedure has an advantage over figured bass exercises, Schoenberg maintains, because the latter “fails . . . to make the pupil self-reliant.” He claims to put forward an alternative in which the student proceeds from the outset of his instruction to invent harmonies and to understand and articulate, both verbally and notationally, the means of their most efficient progression.

Schoenberg reasons that repeating the process of asking and answering the questions will train the student to think more quickly. If it is through musical inspiration that the harmonic language is advanced, then quick, fervent, almost improvisatory activity plays a critical role at

77 Ibid., 14-15.
78 Ibid., 40-41.
79 Ibid., 14.
the frontiers of art. Former pupil Roberto Gerhard relays Schoenberg’s own recollections of composing the *Drei Klavierstücke*, Op. 11 (1909):

[Schoenberg] once pointed out how often he had had to pause in the very act of writing down some of his more unusual sound combinations, startled at the radicalism of his own spontaneous thought: and rubbing out, he tried to take off the edge and tone the thing down, only to find, on re-reading his work the next day, that there was something palpably “wrong” in the passages thus emended and they would only sound “right” when he was able to restore the first notation.⁸⁰

The inspired sounds forged in the act of producing ultimately appealed to Schoenberg’s “sense of form” more satisfyingly than his later, more lugubrious attempts to re-fabricate the spontaneous sounds. The example is illustrative of Schoenberg’s assertion that quick, instinctive thought “plays a leading role in fomenting evolution” in contrast to “thinking too slowly, which easily becomes identical with ‘not thinking at all.’”⁸¹ Such a philosophy of restlessness plays out in the *Harmonielehre* as a larger statement about the advancement of art.

In his first edition Preface, Schoenberg introduces the contrary of comfort and unrest. His Preface is a meditation on the purpose of education, which Schoenberg insists is not simply to recount codified knowledge, but, rather, to instill in the student an enthusiasm for inquiry. “Our age seeks many things,” he writes. “What it has found, however, is above all: comfort.”⁸² Comfort, with its connotations of rest, is for Schoenberg an undesirable state. In the pursuit of knowledge, it implies a certain satisfaction, a complacency to a given conclusion, and submission that the best or only possible explanation to an inquiry has been reached. What has been attained, what has been sorted out, Schoenberg contends, is merely superficial. It matters

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⁸² Ibid., 1; Schoenberg’s emphasis.
little “to know something of everything without understanding anything at all.” Thus, the ideal teacher must not simply report information or educate in that which is immediately accessible: that which is “pleasant” and comfortable, that which has attained stasis. This type of education is lethargic and unproductive.

Rather, Schoenberg charges, “Action must start with the teacher; his unrest must infect the pupils.” The term, unrest, as a contrary to comfort, indicates discontentment, dissatisfaction with an accepted conclusion, and resistance to its continued authority. “The thinker…shows that there are problems and that they are unsolved.” This unrest is reconciled only through the act of investigation (sometimes re-investigation) and contemplation. Schoenberg describes a type of education that is tireless and active, even tumultuous: “It should be clear, then, that the teacher’s first task is to shake the pupil thoroughly.” Thus, Schoenberg embarks on his *Harmonielehre* not simply to summarize the properties of harmony that had themselves attained a sort of stasis. Such a task would be “superficial” and reinforce the current understanding of harmony, which, of course, he had already begun to move past in his own music. Rather, Schoenberg sought for his readers not to reconcile themselves to what he perceived as the outmoded musical philosophies of the day, but to serious exploration of the potential of all musical material.

The philosophy of tireless investigation drives Schoenberg’s emancipated compositions. If the musical past dictated that points of rest are conveyed best by more perfect consonance, then the harmony of the “ultramoderns,” its free use of dissonance, exemplifies the type of ceaseless searching promoted by Schoenberg that would be carried out time and again in the

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83 Ibid., 3.
84 Ibid., 2; emphasis mine.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., 3.
twentieth century. Schoenberg’s post-tonal compositions, then, are an extension of belief in and acceptance of the role of composer as philosopher. Schoenberg intended his *Harmonielehre* not simply as a textbook, but rather as a model for musical inquiry—as reflected in his systematic deconstruction of tonality (which I detail in Chapter 1), where he models primary investigation into the musical literature and the materials of music, and details the inconsistencies between his findings and the existing theory. Consequently, at the core of Schoenberg’s creative identity is the teacher who challenges his students to question and to pursue truth. His relentless pursuit of the “new” is mirrored in his radical harmonic approach, in which the action of contemplative “motion,” like the dissonances within his compositions, remains unresolved.
CHAPTER 5

Music Composition as Craftsmanly Activity

Make ready for work, therefore, and, having set down your cantus firmus as a foundation, try to erect above it in the soprano clef a counterpoint, following the procedure thus far explained.

- Johann Joseph Fux

Schoenberg’s frequent allusions to craftsmanship in the Harmonielehre are useful in rationalizing the composer’s plight in dealing with sound substance. And as I have shown in the previous chapter, Schoenberg’s appeal to craftsmanship is a strategy intended to reaffirm the authority of the composer as fashioner of sound substance above those who merely theorize. But to consider composition as a craft carries implications of the composer as artisan, one whose trade provides some larger communal service, in a manner not at all foreign to German conceptions of the working musician. One need think only of the types of municipal appointments occupied by members of the Bach family to understand the role of musicians in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German culture as civic artisans, apprenticed, appointed, and guilded in a manner not too far removed from vocational tradesmen. Yet, Schoenberg forsakes craftsmanship in search of artistic truths. In his relentless quest for greater means of expression, the true artist is bound only to his individual compulsions.

In contrast, Adams acknowledges a certain civic responsibility as a public artist. “I’ll have to satisfy myself by knowing that the way I do my public service is by creating good art,” Adams once remarked, in reference to his limited opportunities to contribute to charitable public causes. Few composers have had the opportunity to embrace this type of communal identification as fully as Adams has when, commissioned by the New York Philharmonic

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Orchestra to write a memorial work for the one-year anniversary of the attacks of September 11, Adams delivered his oratorio, *On The Transmigration of Souls* (2002): “I recognized that the request for this piece was virtually a call to civic duty and that the orchestra was reaching out to an American composer, asking him to give voice to complicated, communally shared emotions.”³ Likely any type of solemn artistic expression would have served the occasion meaningfully. What is significant about Adams’ score is the heightened poignancy brought about by Adams’ careful selection of compositional materials.

In the days following the attacks, family members of victims inundated Ground Zero with signs displaying the names and pictures of their missing loved ones. Soon after, the *New York Times* began a series of obituaries titled “Portraits of Grief,” that profiled the lives of those who died in the attacks. It is from these signs and obituaries, comprising a “forest” (*silva*) of pre-existing physical material and emotional substance, that Adams fashions much of the libretto of his oratorio.⁴ Fragments of these texts, mirroring the physically and emotionally shattered condition of the nation, as well as the cities and families directly affected by the attacks, are spoken and sung alongside the pre-recorded sounds of New York City daily life, Ivesian trumpet calls, and overwhelming washes of orchestral masses.

Adams’ choice of text is particularly impressionable, and not merely because it provides voice for those who lost their lives in the attacks. Network television coverage broadcast images of Ground Zero laced with the “missing” signs for months after 9/11. And the *New York Times*’ “Portraits of Grief” series ran in the nationally circulating publication every day for fifteen

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⁴ Adams tells us that he got the idea of selecting texts from the “missing” posters when sorting through photos of Ground Zero taken by New York Philharmonic archivist Barbara Haws shortly after the attacks. Ibid., 264.
weeks. By the time of the work’s premiere one year later, the types of remembrances Adams uses in Transmigration were virtually commonplace. Moreover, such descriptions of victims as “She had a voice like an angel,” “He was the apple of my father’s eye,” and “I’ll miss his gentleness, his intelligence, his loyalty, his love,” seem carefully selected in that they could apply to anyone—they could appear in any daily obituary—not just to those who were victims of the attacks.

The familiar and personal character of the texts drives home the reality of 9/11, intensifying what already would have been an emotionally charged communal-artistic experience. Rather than collaborating with a librettist—because “no one stunned by the shock of a sudden loss like this has time or inclination to speak or write with eloquent or flowery language”—Adams selects and fashions pre-existing texts in a manner which invokes shared images of Ground Zero without necessarily recalling musically the specific details of the attack, and which possibly evokes in the listener his or her individual remembrances and emotional journey. Whether or not listeners were personally affected by the events of 9/11, Adams deepens the emotional experience of Transmigration as a “memory space” by drawing from a repository of immediately recognizable, highly personal commonplace sound materials.

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8 Adams quoted in Majorins, “Music as Memorial Space,” 6. Majorins contends that Adams “asks us to remember” through the work’s tripartite architectural design: first by creating a prolonged and static meditative space, secondly by invoking the memories of particular victims, and lastly through a climax which depicts musically the “triumph emerging from tragedy.” pp. 6-8.
Adams writes that he considers Schoenberg a “‘master’ in the same sense that Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms were masters,” exhibiting a reverence for Schoenberg’s abilities as a craftsman and artist. However, Schoenberg’s creative model of restless searching and individual expression, detailed in the *Harmonielehre*, represents for Adams something removed from the perhaps more traditional model of composer as civic artisan: “He was the first composer to assume the role of high-priest, a creative mind whose entire life ran unfailingly against the grain of society.”

The harbinger of musical modernism, Schoenberg and his emancipated dissonance modeled a type of path breaking that would be undertaken time and again throughout the twentieth century. If Schoenberg’s aesthetic represented for Adams an “over-ripening of 19th century Individualism,” then the model of self-isolation presented by Milton Babbitt, a former student of Schoenberg, takes Schoenbergian truth-seeking to an extreme.

John Rockwell characterizes “Babbitt’s purely scientific position” as “the furthest extension of the romantic ideal of the Promethean, independent artist who flies free of the earth and its compromises.” Similarly, John Cage’s ceaseless exploration of sound materials and processes seems a direct result of Schoenberg’s influence. Profiling Cage’s studies with Schoenberg, Michael Hicks describes the life-long impact of Schoenberg’s philosophies on Cage’s work: “What Schoenberg really wanted for his students, Cage believes, was that they not be satisfied with mechanical solutions, but continually search for underlying principles.”

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10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.


If by naming his symphony after Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre*, Adams accesses Schoenberg’s ideal of the composer as truth seeker, perverted into Babbitt’s “composer as scientist/technocrat,” then perhaps Adams intended his composition to reflect an alternative model, what he cites as “the more traditional paradigm of the composer as a free spirit, someone who *uses the materials of everyday life to make art*”.\(^{14}\)

I think most great art has a very close relationship to popular culture. In *Faust* or *Don Quixote* or Shakespeare or *Ulysses* we can find a wonderful intertwining of quotidian experience with the artistic gesture. What’s happened in twentieth-century art in general, but particularly classical music, is that it’s gone in a very wrongheaded direction and become very self-referential. Systems of musical grammar become developed that are virtually solipsistic and have no relationship to the *lingua franca*, musical or emotional. . . . [I]t seems quite obvious to me that once an art form becomes self-referential it’s bound to die. I see in the serial composers, Babbitt, the European avant-garde, that their music *is* inaccessible and tends to be music about itself or similar music.“\(^{15}\)

In contrast, Adams chooses to be accessible. Instead of writing music that is only about itself, he chooses to produce works that communicate musical and emotional substance. In minimalism, particularly the tonal, pulsating scores of Reich, the creative struggle to find new musical languages that began with Schoenberg’s post-tonal compositions came full circle. Minimalism’s almost neo-primitive insistence on pulse and consonantly-derived sonorities reaffirmed for Adams these elements as useful, even universal materials of musical discourse to be shaped in varying ways.

This chapter will explore the ways in which Adams identifies with Schoenberg’s characterization of the musical craftsman, in contrast to the identification of truth-seeker seemingly adopted by Schoenberg in his *Harmonielehre*. While Schoenberg turns inward in his restless search for new musical resources, Adams is not shy about his indebtedness to the

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\(^{14}\) Adams and May, “John Adams Reflects,” 8; emphasis mine.

materials and cultural artifacts of specific times and places. His own *Harmonielehre* references the musical soundscapes of Mahler, Schoenberg, and other composers of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. I will look specifically at Adams’ imitation of Schoenberg’s *Fünf Orchesterstücke*, Op. 16 (1909), Movement III (*Farben*). What is striking about Adams’ adaptation of Schoenberg’s texture is that it is not musical borrowing for its own sake. Adams erects a melody above the churning timbres inspired by Schoenberg’s movement. It becomes a cantus firmus for a wholly new musical product. The significance of my comparative analysis is that, in the remainder of the score, and in the majority of Adams’ compositions of the 1980s, he uses minimalism as a ground in the same manner in which he employs Schoenberg’s *Farben* in Part II of the *Harmonielehre*. Adams is quite literally building onto the foundation of minimalism, which itself represented a new and emerging line of musical discourse.

I. The Materials of Music

Schoenberg’s discussions of the bookbinder, the watchmaker, and the Czech carpenter as artisans invested in the economic use of their physical, tangible resources allows him to articulate through these vivid metaphors the composer’s plight in handling the incorporeal material of sound. One of the most interviewed composers of his generation, Adams is similarly inclined to liken his compositional process to the craftsman’s task of shaping physical material, as demonstrated in his response to one question in an early 1990s’ interview inquiring whether he composed with aid of technology such as MIDI programs:

I use it because I always like to have material in my hands. I’m like a potter. I want to have my hands on the material while I’m working with it. (I’m stretching the metaphor of course, because what I’m actually talking about is being able to hear the music
immediately while I’m working on it.) The image of a composer sitting alone at a desk with nothing but a piece of paper and a pencil is something that has never interested me. As with most contemporary composers, technology has become a tool for Adams to shape and restructure complex textures and to get immediate audio feedback in the form of a MIDI realization. Kyle Gann observes that the benefit of MIDI and sequencing software has allowed even amateur musicians “to create music of considerable sophistication without ever putting a note on paper.” But Adams views this type of software not as a compositional crutch to compensate for deficiencies in study or invention, but rather as a tool by which to make manageable the colossal musical textures which interact often with meticulous complexity in his scores: “I have a very flexible software system, Digital Performer, . . . that allows me to take musical structures and stretch them, transpose them, squeeze them, distort them—move large or small structures around in ways that would be extremely tedious on paper.” A self-admittedly mediocre pianist, Adams interprets his working with composition software as his way of being “in touch with a sound body,” further emphasizing the physical in an art whose material is otherwise intangible.

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19 Adams, Jemian, and de Zeeuw, “An Interview with John Adams,” 92. Adams’ sometimes expansive architectural schemes preclude any feasible performance of his pieces on the piano. John McGinn, piano *reducteur for Harmonium, Nixon, Klinghoffer*, the Violin Concerto, *Gnarly Buttons*, and *I was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky*, recalls such a challenge. Of *Klinghoffer*, he writes, “I had to wrestle with the fact that a certain number of significant musical elements simply couldn’t be realized properly with just two hands and a piano.” And of the Violin Concerto, the reduction of which brought one pianist to tears, McGinn recollects, “The first movement held me at bay – indeed I was quite at a loss – for nearly a year. I worked on movements II and III (both of them with quite intriguing demands though still less problematic than movement I) all the while hoping that some angel might float down from the sky to enlighten me on how to create an effective semblance of all that rich, colorful, multi-layered polyphony in the first movement utilizing only a piano and ten fingers.” McGinn, email interview by Joel Davis. March 29, 2009.
Adams’ *Transmigration* demonstrates that the materials in his compositional woodshed exist beyond the boundaries of his digital workshop. The musical past encompasses a variety of artifacts for Adams’ craftsmanly artistic persona. In Part II, “The Anfortas Wound,” of his *Harmonielehre*, Adams takes Schoenberg’s *Farben*, Movement III of the Five Orchestra Pieces, Op. 16, as his model, reshaping and building upon its pre-existing textures. The movement opens with Double Bass in four-part *divisi* supporting a lyrical theme whose presentation in the muted celli is reminiscent of the Fourth Symphony of Sibelius. The expansive linear movement of the theme recalls the lyrical theme of Part I, and can be viewed as an extension of that melodic idea, which throughout the *Harmonielehre* sounds in alternation with the agitated, minimalist melody of Part I, Theme 1 (see Chapter 2, Table 1). Clarinets provide a two-part imitative counterpoint against the cello theme that recalls the sacred musical conventions of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, possibly an allusion to the movement’s programmatic title, which references the sickly King Anfortas of the Medieval Grail legend, who was unable to procreate (or *create*) due to an un-healing wound to his testicles. In m. 25, the Transitional Passage 2: Chromatic Decent (see Chapter 2, Table 2.1) sequences the movement to its second large section, the *Farben* material, which begins in m. 52.

While the attentive musical sleuth can readily find further allusions to late-Romantic era works in the *Harmonielehre*—and Adams himself cites a number of pieces that certainly forged
his musical impression\(^\text{20}\)—the focus of this chapter will be Adams’ imitation of Movement III of Schoenberg’s *Fünf Orchesterstücke*, Op. 16. The movement, untitled in its original edition, has taken on a number of headings in its long publication and performance history. For the sake of brevity, I shall simply refer to the movement as *Farben*, the title Schoenberg seems to have settled on soon after its original publication and which appears on the 1922 revision.\(^\text{21}\) I center my examination of *Harmonielehre* in *Farben* primarily because of the intriguing way that Adams exploits it. Unlike the explicit homage to Mahler, or the possible reference to Wagner, both of which take place as surface-level events, the *Farben* is foundational. A haunting solo trumpet melody becomes the principle agent above the morphing tone colors. It is arguable that Adams is using *Farben* as a cantus firmus, and I detail the implications of such a conception.

I choose to stress Adams’ borrowing of *Farben* secondly because the movement has long been associated with Schoenberg’s concept of *Klangfarbenmelodie*, introduced in the final pages of *Harmonielehre*, in which melodies are shaped to a greater extent by changes in instrumental color than by pitch.\(^\text{22}\) There is, of course, debate over whether such consideration is appropriate or accurate. The Five Orchestral Pieces, Op. 16 were composed in 1909, two years before


Schoenberg completed his *Harmonielehre*. There is thus a certain amount of credibility to the assertion that, in contrast to exemplifying an already formulated theoretical principle, the movement at most may possibly have led Schoenberg to a clearer conception of *Klangfarbenmelodie*.\(^{23}\) Furthermore, that the movement contains canonic and serial devices which control pitch\(^{24}\) seems antithetical to Schoenberg’s ideal of a logical and coherent musical syntax achieved only through manipulations of tone color. Still, it is difficult to ignore the meticulous attention to timbre featured in the movement. Charles Rosen cites *Farben* as an example of the “emancipation of tone color,” though he stops short of identifying it specifically with the concept of *Klangfarbenmelodie*.\(^{25}\) But if Rosen correctly recognizes a certain “emancipation of tone color” at work in Schoenberg’s *Farben*, and this emancipation implies that timbre is no longer subservient to other parameters of composition such as pitch, then the movement is indeed exemplary of the description of *Klangfarbenmelodie* presented in the *Harmonielehre*.

It is somewhat ironic that a treatise on harmony instruction concludes with the speculation that harmony will shortly become a secondary parameter of composition, but the *Farben* movement of Schoenberg’s Op. 16 certainly prioritizes timbre and the linear development of individual parts at the expense of harmonic refinement. The opening section of the movement is nine measures in length, enclosed on each end by minor-major ninth chords in first inversion (see Example 5.1). Structurally, the minor-major constructs provide useful guideposts for the otherwise amorphous harmonic and rhythmic content contained between them.

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\(^{24}\) See Burkhart, “Schoenberg’s Farben,” 141-172.

In this regard, the minor-major chords operate as structural markers in a manner that resembles the way in which a period or thematic statement in a tonal composition often closes with the same triad with which it begins. There is an important distinction, however, which perhaps undermines the harmonic significance of these chords as structural markers. Their aural effect is dissimilar to the triad in that the sounding tones exhibit dissonances, unresolved conflicts that preclude the effect of euphony and repose typically presented by the triad. As I discuss in Chapter 2, Schoenberg affirms in the *Harmonielehre* that the closer overtones which constitute the perfect intervals and major triad are more euphonious and restful than the dissonances, the more remote overtones. The chord appears in an inversion, and thus likewise remains in conflict with the overtones of the bass tone $C$. Graphical analysis such as that which I present in Example 5.1 can provide visual evidence of the role of harmony in providing structural integrity. But the capacity of the inverted minor-major ninth chord to connote perceptual repose and cadence is undermined by its inherent conflict. Bearing lesser influence on the perception of structure than, say, the melodic and harmonic affirmation of the V-I cadence, harmony in Schoenberg’s *Farben* is supplanted by an emphasis on timbre and the linear development of parts.

Example 5.1 – Schoenberg, *Farben* from Op. 16 (mm. 1-9): Five-Part Canon
Indeed, the nine-measure passage exemplifies the speculation, presented in the last few pages of the *Harmonielehre*, that the evolution of harmony had reached an apex. In his concluding remarks to Chapter 19, entitled “Some Additions and Schematic Presentations to Round Out the System,” Schoenberg predicts that harmony will continue to advance only as the product of the individual movement of parts, as in the first stages of polyphonic writing. Completing the *Fünf Orchesterstücke* two years prior to the initial publication of *Harmonielehre*, Schoenberg demonstrates that he had already conceptualized this new orientation toward melody. As Example 5.1 illustrates, beginning in m. 4, each part of the minor-major sonority ascends one semitone, then descends two semitones. The chordal fifth $E$, which oscillates between Flute 2 and Trumpet 3 ascends to $F$ and descends to $E$-flat (see Example 5.2 below for a breakdown of the instrumental groupings at work in the first nine measures). The remaining parts imitate this melodic treatment, creating a succession of amorphous tone clusters which gradually bleed from AmM9/C to the same harmonic structure pitched one semitone below on the chordal root A-flat. One might view the graphical representation of Example 5.1 as less an illustration of prolongation than one of transposition. The structural division of the first nine measures is determined not by the drive of the harmony to return to the arrangement with which it began, but by the working out of a single melodic idea through the individual parts of the texture. This melodic treatment determines the nine-measure structure to an extent equal to, or perhaps greater than the harmonic guideposts provided by the minor-major ninth chords.

Yet, the movement is devoid of thematic melodic treatment. Its listeners do not “follow” a melodic idea, and the individual motion of the voices is obscured by both their dense scoring in the lower middle register and the understated entrances of the oscillating instrument groupings. Instead, the passage exemplifies the controlling assumption of *Klangfarbenmelodie* that timbre is
elevated as a parameter of musical discourse equal to, if not surpassing that of melody and harmony. After analyzing the harmonic and motivic framework of the movement, Charles Burkhart discusses the ways in which timbre within the setting overcomes its traditionally secondary status and performs as a structuralizing agent:

The dimension of the work that holds us from moment to moment is, of course, color. In traditional orchestral music, instrument changes are generally much slower than changes of pitch: a group of pitches—a phrase, a series of chords—will be assigned just one instrument or group of instruments. In Farben we have the reverse: the changes of instrument (therefore of color) are generally faster than the changes of pitch. 26

Particularly in the first four measures of the movement, the delicate treatment of orchestral timbre takes precedence. Pitch and dynamics are static—unchanging—while five groupings of two instruments exchange entrances, sounding the five individual tones of the AmM9 sonority (see Example 5.2). In the upper part, for instance, the chordal root A oscillates between Flute 1 and English Horn. Discounting the bass voice in which Viola and Double Bass exchange entrances every quarter rhythmic value, each of the individual instruments repeats their allotted chordal member at a rate of two quarter-notes. Written for full orchestra, the condensed, atypical scoring of the passage stands out. Flute 2 is paired with muted trumpet—bassoon with muted horn. Sounding timbres are tied through each new entrance, and Schoenberg emphasizes in his performance directions that the individual entrances are not to be heard.

Adams’ imitation of Schoenberg’s *Farben* begins in m. 52 and subsists through the remainder of the movement. Example 5.3 presents a reduction of the opening fourteen measures of the section. Visually, similarities between Adams’ score and the *Farben* texture (given in Example 5.2) readily stand out. Dynamics in both passages rarely rise above $p$, and material that is sounding is in both passages similarly tied through the entrance of the alternating instrumental groups. In Example 5.3, mm. 56-57, for instance, the bassoons hold an incomplete minor-seventh chord on C-sharp through the entrance of the clarinets. Muted trumpets and horns recall equivalent timbres in Schoenberg’s *Farben*, and, like its model, Adams’ passage does not permit a single instrumental grouping to make two consecutive entrances.

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Example 5.3 – Harmonielehre, Part II (mm. 52-65): Trumpet Melody above Farben Cantus Firmus

This type of meticulous orchestration plays a key role in both passages by Schoenberg and Adams, though Adams’ score presents less an oscillation of instrument groupings than a cyclic progression through various orchestral colors. What is significant about Adams’
instrument groupings is that they seem loosely pre-organized, a characteristic, Burkhart has shown, is shared by Schoenberg’s *Farben.* Groupings comprised of clarinets sound every four measures, and similar treatment is given to the bassoons. Brass and strings make up a second unit, appearing every four bars variously in combinations of horns/viola and trombones/celli. Adams creates a cycle between the harp, violin, flute, and celesta. Harp and violin express an open fifth in the upper register in m. 54; after four measures, the harp reenters, this time with the flute; and in four measures, the harp has been cycled out in favor of flute and celesta.

The timbral, dynamic, and textural similarities between the two passages are strengthened by Adams’ harmonic imitation of Schoenberg’s nine-measure framework. Adams commences the *Farben* section of the movement with a nine-measure series of chords that parallels Schoenberg’s opening section in length and loosely imitates its harmonic motion. The two graphs given here as Examples 5.1 (above) and 5.4 illustrate the similar linear motion of the chordal root down one semitone. The two passages share the fundamental tone A, and in both passages, the A descends one semitone through the nine-measure prolongation to conclude on A-flat. Unlike Schoenberg’s voicing, which presents the chordal root in the top part, Adams’ voicing places the chordal root in the bass. In Example 5.1, the linear motion of the root in the top voice is depicted by a solid bracket connecting the first and last chords. Example 5.4, portraying Adams’ passage, illustrates the movement of the fundamental in the bass voice with a broken slur marking.

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28 Burkhart, “Schoenberg’s *Farben,*” see in particular pp. 151-166.
Example 5.4 – Harmonielehre, Part II (mm. 52-60): Harmonic Reduction

The pitch content of the two chords given in the first and ninth measures of the respective passages is closely related. In m. 52 of Adams’ Harmonielehre, the upper voices of the strings and woodwinds express an A minor triad. This triad can be considered a subset of Schoenberg’s five-part minor-major ninth chord. Both chords take the A minor triad as a foundation, but Schoenberg extends his sonority to the chordal major seventh and ninth. The chords presented in the ninth measure of the two passages are also closely related. Adams writes an incomplete major-seventh chord on A-flat that shares the chordal seventh G with the minor-major sonority in Schoenberg’s score. Adams’ harmony is less complex than Schoenberg’s five-part minor-major ninth chord, and it departs from Schoenberg’s model in its use of the major third, C-natural. However, Adams’ score does hint at the minor-major chordal structure that bookends Schoenberg’s nine-measure framework. In m. 54, the third measure of the passage, violins and harp present the open fifth A-E in the upper register of the orchestra. These tones continue to sound above the F-minor harmony in m. 55, providing both a minor-major quality in addition to the split third A / A-flat.

Adams’ borrowing of Schoenberg’s Farben is as notable for its departures from its model as it is for its imitations. The individual timbres are distinguished more readily in Adams’ score than in Schoenberg’s original setting. In Schoenberg’s Farben, the instrumental groupings alternate at the faster rhythmic rate of one half-note (see Example 5.2). In Adams’ imitation, the
rhythmic value is slower, the changes in timbre occurring every three quarter-notes. Adams also employs a wider palette of orchestral resources. Whereas Schoenberg reduces his full orchestral forces to 10 solo instruments, Adams’ instrumentation spans the breadth and depth of the orchestra’s instrument families. Equally significant, the instruments within each individual grouping are more closely related in Adams’ score than they are in Schoenberg’s nine-measure opening. Discounting the bass part, which alternates between viola and double bass at the rhythmic value of a quarter-note, Schoenberg’s *Farben* opens with two oscillating instrumental groupings. The first group to sound consists of Flutes 1 and 2, Clarinet 1, and Bassoon 2. The second consists of English Horn, muted Trumpet 2, Bassoon 1, and muted Horn 2. While the first group includes only woodwinds, neither of these groupings represent instrumental arrangements that are perceptually readily identifiable. The fairly rapid pace of their alternation, combined with their dense registral distribution, obscures the distinguishing characteristics of the individual instrumental groupings. The timbral effect of the heterogeneous instrumental groupings progressing in alteration is ironically one of homogeneity. Schoenberg has painted outside the lines; the listener can perceive that varying colors are at work, but primary reds, blues, and yellows are not individually identifiable. The texture is unstable, but static, an impression that is reinforced by its amorphous and unrooted harmonic content.

In contrast, Adams’ texture presents a clearly defined progression of orchestral timbres. Timbral exchanges are often also shifts in register, and instrumental groupings are more uniform within themselves, the effect being that the listener more readily perceives the changes from one timbre to the next in Adams’ passage than in the original. Large registral displacements spanning as much as two octaves open and close the nine-measure framework of Adams’ passage. Just as significant, whereas the relationship between instrumental groupings in Schoenberg’s *Farben* is
largely heterogeneous, families of instruments comprise the individual timbres in Adams’ score. There is a significant timbral contrast in the progression from flute / harps to trombones / celli mm. 58-59 and from clarinets / muted horns to flutes / celesta in mm. 61-62. Likewise, some groupings feature highly individual timbral colorings, such as the stopped horns in m. 65. The contrast between timbres in Part II of Adams’ score is less nebulous than that of Schoenberg’s passage. The listener is sure of his footing; one perceives clear lines of contrast in the work and, thus, a forward drive that is absent from the gelatinous timbral masses presented in the Farben.

Adams’ harmonic treatment further sets Schoenberg’s Farben texture into focus. Schoenberg’s canonic part writing creates a series of inchoate tone clusters bookended by the minor-major ninth sonority in first inversion, a structure that is itself hardly perceptually discernible. Adams’ passage uses narrow linear development (if the analyst maintains octave equivalency; see Example 5.4) similar to that of Schoenberg’s, but the individual parts of Adams’ nine-measure passage do not progress in a canon. Instead, Adams’ nine-measure framework exhibits a very clear delineation of harmonies. The first and last chords of the nine-measure passage appear in root position and are, for reasons discussed above, more concrete as structural harmonic guideposts than Schoenberg’s inverted minor-major construct. Similarly, the interior chords are simpler tertian structures, mostly triads, sonorities that, as Schoenberg admits in his Harmonielehre, are more easily grasped by the ear of the observer. Above, I offer that the effect of Schoenberg’s complex harmonies, quickly oscillating instrumental groupings, and unusual instrument combinations creates a sound texture that is unstable, yet relatively homogenous, and thus motionless. Adams presentation of more readily discernible chordal structures creates a sense of harmonic alternation and forward drive that is otherwise absent from Schoenberg’s original Farben texture.
The objection might be raised that, from a tonal-analytical viewpoint, Adams’ treatment of harmony lacks the type of dominant-tonic conflict that connotes departure from, and return to tonic—in short, that his harmonic treatment is, like Schoenberg’s texture, relatively static.

Adams’ series of chord successions do not present a motion away from the tonic A-minor triad. The chords hover around the III (C-sharp minor) and VI (F-minor) tonal regions, without progressing to a strong dominant sonority, and thus represent a prolongation of tonic A-minor. This interpretation is strengthened by Adams’ literal prolongation of A-minor the in the extreme upper register of the orchestra. In Example 5.4, solid slur lines illustrate this prolongation, which can be considered a linear descent of the soprano voice from tonic A, through the chordal fifth E, and concluding on the chordal third C of A-flat major. The chordal third of the A-minor triad is also prolonged, as demonstrated by broken slur lines in Example 5.4; it descends by semitone to B-natural in m. 56, but returns to its position of the chordal third C of the A-flat major seventh chord. As my analysis shows, the prolongation of this part is also supported through its localized linear development. Taking octave equivalency into consideration, the voice progresses linearly only by semitone to and from C-sharp (we must consider the voice to briefly perform in divisi between the C-sharp and B in m. 56). And one can trace a similar prolonged and localized linear development in the chordal fifth E of the original A-minor triad. It progresses linearly only by semitone to and from F before expanding to the chordal seventh G-natural of the closing A-flat harmony. This tonal-analytical perspective would hold that Adams’ prolongation of A-minor is not too far removed from Schoenberg’s extended transposition of the minor-major ninth chord.

The interior harmonies of the nine-measure passage offer no strong alternative to the A-minor tonality. Without this strong motion away from tonic, the series of chords seem to be
directionless\textsuperscript{29}: as noted by Schoenberg, “A \textit{succession} is aimless; a \textit{progression} aims for a definite goal.”\textsuperscript{30} The tonal-analytical perspective would seem to support a view that Adams’ harmonies, while simpler than Schoenberg’s amorphous succession of tone clusters, nevertheless impart a sort of harmonic directionless similar in its staticism to the original texture of Schoenberg’s \textit{Farben}.

However, a critical distinction is to be made of the harmonic treatment in the two works. Whereas Schoenberg’s emphasis on linear development and timbre undermine harmony as a parameter of structure and development, Adams’ use of timbre and register support and illuminate his interior harmonizations. In Schoenberg’s \textit{Farben}, harmony is secondary; changes in timbre occur at a much faster rate than changes in harmony, which are themselves only the products of the passage’s canonic linear development of the individual parts. In contrast, Adams may emphasize a variety of orchestral colors in his passage, but he does not negate harmony entirely from his conception. Significantly, changes in timbre are also changes in harmony. Timbre does not oscillate at a faster rate than the harmonic change, as it does in Schoenberg’s texture. Instead, linear development is deemphasized, likely because of the solo trumpet sounding above the texture. Indeed, Adams’ harmonic \textit{progression} is less the product of part writing than it is the entrance and exit of individual instrumental groups. The progression of tone colors strengthens the perception of harmonic change and development with each new entrance. Adams’ inner harmonies convey a strong sense of alternation not heard in Schoenberg’s work, contributing a certain perceptual forward drive to the setting. But equally important, Adams’ harmonic progression—which, indeed, is not merely a transposition—exhibits an important

\textsuperscript{29} Such is the conclusion of Paul Barsom. See “Large-Scale Tonal Structure in Selected Orchestral Works by John Adams, 1977-1987” (PhD diss., University of Rochester, 1998), 33, ProQuest (AAT 9828451).

harmonic conflict at work throughout the *Harmonielehre*. The transformation from A-minor to A-flat major is the same type of R-5 triadic transformation that occurs between the composition’s dramatic interplay between E-minor and E-flat major tonalities (see Chapter 3). This transformation might be slightly obscured by the omission of the chordal fifth, *E-flat* in the A-flat major sonority (again, the major seventh *G* is instead included). But we cannot discount the fact that the opening E-minor sonority of the entire composition likewise omits the chordal fifth. In his short progression, Adams’ has encapsulated the central harmonic conflict of the *Harmonielehre*. Adams has reshaped Schoenberg’s mostly static texture into one of conflict, motion, and direction.

A final brief but important distinction is to be made between the *Farben* of Schoenberg and Adams’ imitation of his setting. In Schoenberg’s original score, fragments of melodic splashes interrupt what is otherwise a surface-level haze of orchestral colors. But in Adams’ score the *Farben* texture is foundational. A haunting solo sounds above and in contrast with the churning orchestral timbres (see Example 5.3). Definitions of cantus firmus are consistent in attributing to it two essential qualities: that it is pre-existing material, and that it is chosen “as the basis of a new composition.” Adams has appropriated Schoenberg’s *Farben* as a starting point for a wholly new work in a manner not at all foreign to the ways in which composers from the earliest polyphonic settings selected and reshaped pre-existing musical artifacts. Below, I discuss the implications of this conception which arise not only regarding Adams’ use of *Farben*, but also including his adoption of minimalism. Adams’ grand architectural complexes, discussed

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extensively in Chapter 3 of this study, are similarly erected above the churning, pulsating textures of musical minimalism.

II. Starting Places

It is easy to read the juxtaposition in Adams’ *Harmonielehre* of musical materials derived from two very different musical epochs as one marker of his postmodernity. The composition’s synthesis of Romantic-era lyricism and minimalist syntactical elements (which I detail in Chapter 3) reflects a postmodern pluralist ideology that takes all historical, high-brow, popular, and vernacular conventions as fair game, and exemplifies the observation of Jonathan D. Kramer that “postmodern pastiche is anti-historical: the past coexists with, and indeed is indistinguishable from, the present.”

Jankowitz and Rörich insist that such deliberate anachronisms have the capacity to convey pointed ideological meaning. Their analysis of Adams’ *Harmonielehre* draws on postmodern theories of intertextuality to argue that Adams’s work is a parody not of the borrowed Romantic-era elements, but of minimalism, and that the musical allusion to Schoenberg’s *Gurrelieder* and other late Romantic-era compositions “stands for Adams as a metaphor for his own exaggerated sense of the loss, in 20th-century modernism, of tonal expressivity.”

As I have shown in Chapter 3, Adams does indeed seem to be rejecting the strict modernist aesthetics of minimalism, preferring to situate his work within the dramatic musical conventions of the symphonic genre. And Jankowitz and Rörich are right to point out, as I do, that Adams’ coy title may be a reference to a specific time and place from which he draws

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his materials. But therein lies a particular impasse that is difficult to reconcile. Many of his other
titles make reference to the pre-existing materials and sound vocabularies that he chooses to
work with. When it echoes the disjunct, jazzy melodies of Franz Waxman’s film score to *Sunset
Boulevard* (1950), does the saxophone solo of *City Noir* parody minimalist elements still at work
in Adams’ aesthetic in 2009?

The type of terminological identification associated with theories of postmodernism has
been neither the purpose nor the goal of this study.34 Instead, I argue that the interpretational
foundation lies not strictly in the musical score, nor in the analytical models of theory; rather, it
is the relationship between music and Schoenberg’s document that perhaps imparts the more
fundamental truth that Adams’ *Harmonielehre*, while peculiar in its juxtaposition of minimalist
and late Romantic-era musical materials, nevertheless represents a traditional, even pervasive
compositional paradigm. Adams does not eschew the cultural materials of the past. Nor does he
ignore the developments of the modernist era; rather, he appropriates, synthesizes, reinterprets,
and fashions musical substance in the way composers for centuries have crafted the pre-existing
musical elements of different idioms and geographic regions. Commenting on Adams’ penchant
for “stylistic mixing,” French composer-critic Renaud Machart has connected Adams to the
international flavor of late-Baroque composition:

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34 I do not disagree that postmodern classifications are useful or entirely inaccurate in describing the music
of John Adams. His work is too frequently and too easily associated with postmodernism to warrant such an
opposition. The conclusions of Jankowitz and Rörich are certainly enriched and more critical because these authors
have carefully situated Adams’ work within theories of postmodernism. Similarly, Catherine Pellegrino has made an
interesting and original contribution to scholarship on Adams in her examinations of the relationship between
closure and postmodernist aesthetics in his compositions. Catherine Ann Pellegrino, “Formalist Analysis in the
Context of Postmodern Aesthetics: The Music of John Adams as a Case Study” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1999),
ProQuest (AAT 9954355); and “Aspects of Closure in the Music of John Adams,” *Perspectives of New Music* 40,
no. 1 (Winter 2002): 147-175. Adams has reluctantly acknowledged a relationship between his *Harmonielehre*, and
his compositional approach in general, and descriptions of postmodernity: “Even though I hate the word
postmodernism I am probably the most postmodern composer alive, at least in this sense of the term.” Quoted in
Müller-Berg, “Tonal harmony is like a natural force,” 224.
. . . with this multiplicity of stylistic tools, Adams’s intentions are akin to those of many Baroque composers, who wrote during a time when the use of different languages and practices was not prohibited. One need only think of Monteverdi’s *Vespers of the Blessed Virgin*, Bach’s B minor Mass, and Purcell’s Anthems and Trio Sonatas.35

Machart’s comparison is pertinent, lest we forget that Bach transcribed and emulated the Italian concerti of Vivaldi, and Lully’s French overture became almost universal in Europe during the High Baroque. Yet, one does not have to equate Adams’ creative aesthetic solely to Baroque-era internationalism, nor specifically to music. Bartók, who identified Bach’s “musical material” to be “the music of some hundred and odd years before him,” quips that Shakespeare similarly “borrowed the stories of his plays from all sources. Does that prove that his brain was barren and he had to go to his neighbours begging for themes?”36 And in the twentieth century, Leonard Bernstein heralded jazz as a wellspring of “new musical material” which “solved simultaneously the two problems of being original and of being American.”37

The relationship between Adams’ *Harmonielehre* and Schoenberg’s treatise underscores the fundamental principle that, for all the ruptures from established musical models that occurred between their appearances, music composition remains an act of selecting and reshaping pre-existing sound materials. Schoenberg insists that the artists’ act is also one of intuitive and spontaneous creation, and he affirms that the artist who has cultivated his inner consciousness and spiritual being through countless hours of study, emulation, and assimilation of the musical literature has something more to say in his work than those who merely imitate. The fashioning

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of his sound materials takes place in his subconscious; his notations are the result of his intuitive reworking (artificialis) of the materials that have informed his musical and spiritual world. As I show in Chapter 3, Adams similarly has expressed a desire to be in touch with his inner creative impulses, but the extent to which his compositional approach differs from the artistic conception presented in Schoenberg’s Harmonielehre seems to be a matter of the degree to which the composer reveals or conceals his indebtedness to external musical models.

Adams is not shy about revealing his sources. If at its simplest, the title Harmonielehre is a signifier of musical materials from a specific time and place, then his appropriation of an artifact of that culture—Schoenberg’s Op. 16, Movement III—as a cantus firmus is but one step removed from the Renaissance cantus firmus mass, which takes as its title the name of the pre-existing melody on which it is based. Critic Michael Steinberg recalls that, upon visiting with Adams’ around the time of the work’s premiere, “a well-worn score of Gurrelieder . . . occupied a conspicuous place on a shelf by the tail of his grand piano.”38 The second movement of Harmonielehre climaxes with two large ascending orchestral gestures that lead to what is perhaps the most identifiable “quotation” of another composition, Mahler’s unfinished Tenth Symphony: four unison trumpets sustain the tone B in the instrument’s upper register in alternation with the rest of the orchestral forces, which present a highly dissonant Gmaj7 + FmM7 chordal complex at fff. Still, Adams’ direct reference to Mahler’s Symphony is far from precise. The gesture occurs twice in the symphony in Movements 1 and 3. In the third movement, where it is more dramatic, solo trumpet sustains a high A against the intermittent orchestral entrances, which give a 9-note tertian construct erected on the fundamental tone C-sharp (C-sharp, G-sharp, B, D, F, A, C, E-flat, G).

Adams is careful to make a distinction between the ways in which he appropriates and refashions musical materials in the *Harmonielehre* and the ways in which his contemporaries cut and paste compositions of the past in the manner of collage pieces:

At that time there were composers who were making collages of earlier music in the United States, like David del Tredici, or Rochberg or Lukas Foss. They wrote pieces that referred to music of the past, but in a way I thought was not really creative or revealing. I think, in comparison with these composers, . . . I was trying to create a structure that was genuinely new, not a retread of some favorite work from a hundred years ago. I was interested in using certain artifacts from the past, and I still do that to some extent.  

What comes through [. . .] is not, say, “Mahler,” but rather John Adams’s personal, private experience of Mahler . . . or whomever. And I find that the best art is that way. Certainly, no one takes James Joyce or Thomas Mann or William Gaddis to task for their filtering of the past.”

It is significant that Adams, in referencing Joyce, Mann, and Gaddis, makes the same comparison to literature as Bartók. Both composers recognize that selecting and shaping useable material is a fundamental aspect of creating art. Similarly, Adams’ explanation of his “personal, private experience of Mahler” recalls Schoenbergian principles of studying and digesting the models presented by the masterworks. Like Schoenberg, Adams suggests that his internal creative impulses, saturated with the sounds and impressions of his immersion into the musical past, present a reworking of the materials he has absorbed in a lifetime of musical study. Further, in characterizing his efforts to “create a structure that was genuinely new,” Adams hints at the principles behind cantus firmus that the composer composes new material as a counterpoint to the model which he takes as a foundation.

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39 Adams quoted in Muller-Berg, “*Tonal harmony is like a natural force,*” 224. Müller-Berg agrees, noting that Adams’ intent is not to quote his sources directly. See p. 13 above.

The purpose of my above analysis is to demonstrate the ways in which Adams does not simply imitate the *Farben* movement of Schoenberg’s Op. 16; rather, he takes it as a model and foundation for the basis of a new compositional structure. The *Farben* textures are materials, comparable to the pre-existing sound substance of nature, which Adams can shape and build upon as he sees fit. As Schoenberg affirms, “To be sure, nature admits of such diverse interpretations that we can include in it even our artifacts, our cultural products.”

The evolution of art, Schoenberg implies, is as indebted to the type of conceptual reworking of the past demonstrated in Adams’ adaptation of the *Farben* texture as it is to the type of profound break with the past represented by Schoenberg’s emancipation of dissonance:

The development of the harmonic resources is explained primarily through the conscious or unconscious imitation of a prototype; every imitation so produced can then itself become a prototype that can in turn be imitated.

Schoenberg’s theory of the evolution of tonal resources plays out as a contrast between the imitation of and the break from harmonic models. The triad and diatonic scale are imitations of the natural prototype: the harmonic series. The diatonic triads, similarly, are imitations of the triad. Secondary dominants are imitations of the V7 chord on an alternate scale degree, and the Neapolitan chord is merely the imitation of the major triad on scale-degree II. And yet, the harmonic system presents a number of breaks with the natural prototype attributable only to art: inversions, whole tone and other “vagrant” chords, the minor triad and equal temperament. In this regard, the Part II of *Harmonielehre*, in which Adams borrows, reshapes, and literally erects material above the pre-existing sound substance of Schoenberg’s *Farben*, might be considered an extension—albeit a symbolic one—of Schoenberg’s novel cultural-conceptual framework in which timbre overcomes harmony as an elemental parameter of shaping musical substance. As

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42 Ibid., 385.
we shall see, minimalism represents a similar starting place, a new cultural prototype for the treatment of musical material, rooted in the same type of rejection of the musical past as Schoenberg’s emancipated dissonance.

In Chapter 2, I have attempted to detail, among other theoretical and aesthetic dialogues, the profound logic behind Schoenberg’s now (in)famous arrival at atonality presented in the *Harmonielehre*. The traditional musical-historical narrative largely regards his emancipation of dissonance as merely the final step of a hyper-chromatic, hyper-dissonant musical culture within which the treatment of dissonance was sometimes unprepared, prolonged and exaggerated, and unresolved. The *Harmonielehre* suggests otherwise. Schoenberg may have sought to progress the harmonic language, but the text does not present his radical approach as an extension of the masterworks of the recent past. Rather, Schoenberg bases his new harmonic conception in a reevaluation of consonance and dissonance that takes as artificial and irrelevant the entire cultural development of harmonic practice from its earliest manifestations in organum and counterpoint. These traditions held that points of cadence and rest are points of more perfect consonance, creating a consonance-over-dissonance hierarchy upon which resided the entirety of Western harmonic practice. By challenging this hierarchy, Schoenberg effectually wiped the harmonic slate clean; his exploration of the “natural model” without the “artificial” constraints of a controlled and subordinate dissonance is almost neoprimitive in conception, reverting musical practice (at least *harmonically*) back to a time before the first influences of art took hold. In his treatment of harmony, Schoenberg denied entirely the models, experiences, and traditions of culture in an attempt to explore uninhibitedly what he believed to be the raw materials of nature.

Of the many attempts in the twentieth century to repeat Schoenberg’s lofty reexamination of natural sound materials, perhaps none have come as close as minimalism has in equaling or
surpassing Schoenberg’s (albeit controversial) success or lasting influence. John Cage might be seen as an extreme example of Schoenbergian truth-seeking. His adoption of all sound material as “not just potential music, but actual music from the start”⁴³ (as in the 4’33” of 1952) and relegation of craft to such indeterminate methods as graphing the night sky onto empty sheets of staff paper (Atlas Eclipticalis, 1962) echo Schoenberg’s investment in nature at the expense of refined craftsmanship—for, Schoenberg acknowledged, “reflection on nature may have value for the theory of knowledge without being thereby necessarily capable of bearing immediate artistic fruits.”⁴⁴ But few would argue that Cage has impacted the sound of new music in the ways that minimalism has for the last thirty years. John Adams has called minimalism “the only really important development in Western art music since World War Two.”⁴⁵ Susan McClary considers it “perhaps the single most viable extant strand of the Western art-music tradition.”⁴⁶ And for some, “minimalism is most often seen not as the beginning of a new drama of stylistic evolution, but as finis Terrae musicologicae, as the ‘last identifiable new style in music history.’”⁴⁷ Like Schoenberg’s emancipated dissonance, minimalism rebooted the cultural practice of harmony to a primordial state. Its insistence on consonance and perfect intervals depicts the earliest stage of

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⁴⁴ Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 48.


human exploration into the harmonic series, a time preceding culture’s “attempt to mingle the more remote overtones, the dissonances, with the consonances.”

Put another way, if Schoenberg justified his emancipation of dissonance as an imitation of the natural intervalllic relationships between the higher partials of the harmonic series, then minimalism may be seen as a reinvestment into the Naturklang’s lower, “stronger sounding overtones.” The first minimalists may not have not claimed as much explicitly, but Edward Strickland’s account of early minimalism affirms that, among at least one “founder” of minimalism, there was a deep interest in Pythagorean harmonics. La Monte Young’s “predilection for perfect fourths and fifths” in such early drone pieces as Music for Strings (1958), Strickland writes, stemmed from the composer’s “movement to the Pythagorean mathematics of the harmonic series.” Young conceptualized his treatment of harmony within the Greek empirical understanding of the natural ratios, and the product of his conception was thus an imitation of the overtone series’ lower intervalllic design.

Indeed, “neo-primitivism,” one result of the early attempts to label what became known as minimalism, aptly describes its treatment of harmony. Its insistence on consonance and static or only gradual harmonic development reflects the same type of new-beginning, working-with-scratch-materials logic in which Schoenberg, in his Harmonielehre, situates his treatment of dissonance. It is minimalism’s avant-gardeness, its radical departure from the harmonic priorities of the immediate and historic European musical tradition, that validates its return to “tonality” or “modality” (both frequently used, but inadequate terms describing the harmonic treatment in minimalist pieces). “The minimalist wash had cleared the decks and given credibility to tonal,

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48 Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, 46.
49 Ibid., 20.
triadic materials by seeing them in a new light,” writes Robert Carl. “Reich, Glass, and Riley were admirable in that, while rejecting Schoenberg’s atonal revolution as if the first half of the century had never happened, they did not simply return to the pre-Schoenbergian world of Brahms and Mahler.”

In a sense, minimalism had out-natured Schoenberg in its purer imitation of the natural model. Further, its affinity with world music, jazz, and popular music not merely in its consonantly-derived harmonic orientation, but also in its regular pulsations and repetitive qualities speaks to the universality and naturalness of each of these elements. As composer Rhys Chatham has written, “The modernist project of this century was concluded, give or take a few years, during the sixties with the phenomenon of minimalism, the apogee of modernism, which succeeded in deconstructing music to its basic signifiers: a beat, a chord, a sound.”

And, significantly, the raw nature of the minimalist style failed to escape the ear of John Adams, who once characterized it as “an utterly stripped-down re-evaluation of extremely primal, fundamental musical concepts – pulsation, tonality, repetition.”

Adams found in minimalism a rekindling of these elements which, he notes, “had been systematically destroyed or ‘deconstructed’ by the serialists, starting with Schoenberg and culminating in the 1960s and 1970s with radical forms of composition.” More importantly, he considers the elements of minimalism useful to the type of larger compositional complexes and emotional-communicative gestures that he wishes to create. His conception of minimalist elements remains one of useful, adaptable, physical material: “The focus is on smaller cells, fragments that are manipulated as an architect might manipulate bricks or small blocks to build

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52 Rhys Chatham quoted in Fink, “(Post-)minimalism,” 540.
53 Adams quoted in Smith and Smith, New Voices, 5.
larger structure. It’s certainly the essence of minimalist technique.” As I have shown in Chapter 3, it is from his appropriation and adaptation of minimalist elements that Adams erects the larger architectural schemes of Harmonielehre. Adams’ stratifications of minimalist textures forge large developmental structures and melodic-accompanimental complexes that better fit his own craftsmanly creative spirit to piece together, construct, and shape the plethora of sound substance available to him as a composer at the turn of the twenty-first century.

As the only movement not to incorporate minimalist elements, Part II of Adams’ Harmonielehre establishes Schoenberg’s Op. 16, Movement III as a foundation for a larger architecture in a manner similar to the ways in which the outer movements expand upwards from minimalist textures. In the final analysis, then, the Farben material at work in Adams’ Harmonielehre is less about an anachronistic mode of expression than it is exemplary of the ways in which Adams exploits the model and materials of minimalism. In his Harmonielehre, as in many of his compositions, Adams establishes minimalist foundations above which his more intuitive, “naïve” musical gestures, comprised of the sounds of varying cultures and eras, interact freely and without regard to the constraints of mid-twentieth century Puritanism.

III. Part 2 Conclusions

Differences in compositional priorities between Adams and Schoenberg certainly can be attributed to their individual times and places apart from the examination of their respective Harmonielehren. Schoenberg was not the only composer at the turn of the twentieth century to hold the view that the materials and system of tonality had become saturated. But unlike Bartók, who sought cultural materials in the peasant melodies of central Europe, or Stravinsky, who turned sharply toward past musical models, Schoenberg advanced inward into his own “sense of

55 Adams quoted in Müller-Berg, “Tonal harmony is like a natural force,” 226.
form” to create art from a source of unbridled spontaneity. To fashion music from external
models seemed to be too simple of an artistic act for Schoenberg, whose attempt to become more
fully attuned to the models of his inner sound world reset the cultural-musical tradition. As I
have shown in Chapter 3, despite their differences in time and place, the music of Adams
operates similarly to this type of intuitive gesture.

The difference between the two composers, then, is not one of time, but one of *timing*.
Schoenberg’s intuitive impulses manifest themselves as surface-level features of his
compositions, as in the movement *Farben*, from his *Fünf Orchesterstücke*, Op. 16. I argue above
that minimalism represents the same type of historical counterpoint as that which resulted from
Schoenberg’s emancipated compositions. In this regard, minimalism is similarly a surface-level
succession of musical events which, Schwarz writes, “Adams believes . . . is malleable enough
for something wholly individual to be created from it, just as Schoenberg’s idiom was
transformed by Berg and Webern.”56 The analysis above demonstrates that Adams indeed
subscribes to this type of broad musical-historical narrative. Minimalist and Schoenbergian
textures are treated as *continuos*, as foundational *grounds* for the more intuitive designs of
Adams’ melodic-thematic gestures. Minimalism presented a new-found wealth of old resources,
a return to nature, so-to-speak, and a brand new foundation upon which to build a musical
tradition. Adams literally erects his musical architectures above minimalist elements in the same
manner in which he exploits Schoenberg’s *Farben* as a cantus firmus, a pre-existing model.

In this dissertation, I have attempted to underscore Adams’ creative identification within
contemporary culture as an artist willing to engage in cultural and aesthetic issues. This type of
identification has heretofore been reserved for the Adams of opera, an artist who has proven himself
capable of rendering grand socio-political statements. His collaborations with producer Peter Sellars

56 K. Robert Schwarz, “Young American Composers,” 11.
explore such controversial issues as atomic proliferation, immigration, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and U.S.-China relations. But while his operas rightly have received the critical attention demanded of their cultural relevance, his orchestral compositions rarely inspire such dialogue. The orchestral works do not supply the narratives which make cultural critique in the operas readily accessible. Nonetheless, as I have shown, Adams does provide cultural backgrounds for his orchestral works. His titles, complemented by descriptions and explanations of his works on his website, in interviews, and in his autobiography, associate many of his orchestral compositions with literary texts, such as poetry, fiction, and aesthetic-philosophical essays.

Such associations carry rhetorical implications that I have begun to flesh out in my examination of Harmonielehre. The cultural materials within which Adams situates his instrumental compositions become a shared point of departure, a commonplace, between the audience and the composer. By using this shared space, Adams contextualizes his music within the intellectual and cultural scope of each literary text. His compositions become more than musical substance; they become a type of rhetoric, an argument or statement of Adams’ own position on a given social or aesthetic issue. In this study, I have shown that, through his direct reference to Schoenberg’s Harmonielehre, Adams is able to convey a philosophical program through which he makes a strong statement about his own creative identification. Like Schoenberg, Adams sought to distance himself from the prevailing cultural aesthetic. This inclination is manifested in his Harmonielehre as an adoption and subversion of one type of modernist expression, that of minimalism. And I have argued that Schoenberg similarly presents the resources of tonality while undermining the validity of their continued usefulness.

Now more than a decade into the twenty-first century, Adams continues to draw on and use a wide variety of cultural materials to generate creative and original works. City Noir (2009) is a jazz-tinged orchestral setting meant to capture musically the Los Angeles-based film noir movie genre of the 1940s and 1950s. Yet, his penchant associate his works with literature and cinema is but one
aspect of his wider cultural relevance. His operas are known worldwide, and one, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, was adapted for film. More than just a composer, he is active as a conductor and lecturer. Additionally, he hosts an official website where he provides program notes to his compositions, maintains an up-to-date biography, and blogs every few days on some artistic or political matter. He published his autobiography in 2008, and he has granted countless interviews to national presses, local media outlets, and even doctoral candidates. It is arguable that the increasingly inaccessible music of the post-World War II avant-garde diminished the cultural relevance of concert music at a time when American audiences were finding new mediums of entertainment in television, cinema, and popular music. Adams’s literary contexts, in contrast, are one of a number of methods through which he cultivates audiences, heightens the cultural currency of his own work, and promotes the cause of contemporary concert music.

This dissertation has been an attempt not only to reach a fuller understanding of the association between Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre* and its namesake, but also to better assess Adams’ own philosophies on art, culture, and his role as a medium through which this relationship unfolds. He has cultivated a listening audience through an identifiably bright, consonant musical model within the traditional concert mediums of the opera and orchestra. But while the overt social contexts of the operas continue to be studied, the extent to which Adams enters into cultural dialogue in his non-operatic works has not until now been thoroughly considered. The textual associations of Adams’ compositions have wide-reaching cultural and aesthetic implications, and a study such as this, in which I have sought to expose the broader discourse inherent in the interrelationship between these two *Harmonielehren*, takes a small step toward better understanding the creative drives of one of America’s leading composers.
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