City University of New York (CUNY)
CUNY Academic Works

Publications and Research
CUNY Graduate Center

1991

The "Anxiety of Influence" in Twentieth-Century Music

Joseph N. Straus
CUNY Graduate Center

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_pubs/411
Discover additional works at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).
Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

The "Anxiety of Influence" in Twentieth-Century Music

JOSEPH N. STRAUS

The musical world of this century has been dominated, to an extraordinary and unprecedented degree, by the music of the past. Performers play music primarily by long-deceased canonical composers, composers learn their craft by studying the masterworks of the past, including the distant past, and scholars devote themselves to studying increasingly ancient musical monuments. The past has never been so powerfully present as in this century.[1]

In this historical situation, composers have felt an understandably deep ambivalence toward the masterworks of the past. On the one hand, those masterworks inspire admiration, even reverence. At the same time, they also inspire the kind of anxiety that one often feels in the presence of powerful, dominating, and intimidating figures. In Stravinsky's phrase: "The artist feels his 'heritage' as the grip of a very strong pincers."[2] The musical tradition, Stravinsky suggests, may provide inspiration, but it also imposes narrow constraints.

What Stravinsky felt as a "strong pincers," Schoenberg experienced as a painful sense of compulsion. He imagined himself as having been forcibly expelled from an Eden of musical common practice:

Volume IX • Number 4 • Fall 1991
The Journal of Musicology © 1991 by the Regents of the University of California

---

[1] This situation represents the culmination of a range of cultural and social developments, with roots in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These developments included a shift in musical taste from contemporary to older music, the emergence of a musical mass culture with its preference for familiar and sanctioned masterworks, the increasing separation of the popular and classical traditions, and the crystallization of the classical canon. For an authoritative discussion of these developments, see a series of articles by William Weber: "The Contemporaneity of Eighteenth-Century Musical Taste," *Musical Quarterly* LXX/2 (1984), 175–94; "Mass Culture and the Reshaping of European Musical Taste, 1770–1870," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* VIII/1 (1977), 5–22; "Learned and General Musical Taste in Eighteenth-Century France," *Past & Present* LXXXIX (1980), 58–85.

[2] Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Memories and Commentaries* (Berkeley, 1981), p. 127.

"My destiny had forced me in this direction . . . The Supreme Commander had ordered me on a harder road."[3] Who is this Supreme Commander, this cruel and unforgiving God? It is the tonal tradition itself, its weight and prestige pushing Schoenberg painfully forward.

Inevitably, this ambivalence toward the past shaped musical structure, giving rise to a dual compositional strategy of incorporation and revision. Twentieth-century composers use traditional materials, but transform them. Twentieth-century music is extraordinarily rich in allusions to the music of the past. Even works that are not explicitly neoclassical are often deeply preoccupied with traditional music, its forms, its sonorities, its syntax. But no easy accommodation is possible across the stylistic and structural gulf that separates the traditional tonal music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from the new post-tonal music of the twentieth. Sonorities like the triad, forms like the sonata, and structural motions like the descending perfect fifth can never meld quietly into a post-tonal context. Rather, the traditional elements become a locus of musical tension. They evoke the traditional musical world even as they are enmeshed in new musical structures.

Twentieth-century music thus often presents a paradoxical appearance. On the one hand, this is a period of radical change in musical style and structure. In the history of Western music, there have been many "new musics," but probably none so new, so different, and so hard to assimilate as the new music of our century. At the same time, the music of this period is extraordinarily rich in allusions to the music of the past, including the distant past. As a result, there is at the core of many twentieth-century works, a conflict between the traditional elements and the post-tonal context that subsumes them.[4]

The opening of Berg's Violin Concerto gives a clear sense of this clash of old and new.[5] In isolation from its musical surroundings, the passage in Example 1 has a very traditional feel. It can be understood harmonically as a succession of triads, one per measure: G-minor, D-major, A-minor, and E-major. This succession even lends itself to a functional interpretation in G-minor, as shown in the example. It can be heard as a relatively simple harmonic progression, elaborated by 4–3 and 7–6 suspensions. This tonal interpretation does not make the passage seem particularly interesting, but it does make it reasonably intelligible.

---

[3] Arnold Schoenberg, "On Revient Toujours," *Style and Idea,* ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (New York, 1975; reprint ed. Berkeley, 1984), p. 109.

[4] For a full account of the musical consequences of the conflict, see Joseph N. Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), from which the present article is adapted.

[5] For a related discussion of the Berg Violin Concerto and the surrounding historical and theoretical issues, see Arnold Whittall, "The Theorist's Sense of History: Concepts of Contemporaneity in Composition and Analysis," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* CXII/1 (1986–87), 1–20.

A more potent meaning is imposed on the passage by the musical context in which it occurs. In the introduction that precedes it, the solo violin traces the arpeggiated figures shown in Example 2. As the solo violin gradually unfolds the entire chromatic it presents four distinct registral lines. Each registral line begins by outlining a triad. In ascending registral order, these are G-minor, D-major, A-minor, and E-major. The temporal order of the four triads in Example 1 thus recapitulates their registral order in Example 2. That relationship places the triads of Example 1 in a very different perspective. Instead of referring to common-practice norms of harmonic progression, they now sound like verticalized statements of previous registral lines.

Still richer meanings are suggested by the music in Example 3 that immediately follows the triadic passage. In these measures, the solo violin gives the first clear statement of the twelve-tone series for the concerto (order positions within the series are indicated on the example). That suggests a way of rehearing Example 1 in twelve-tone terms. The triads in Example 1 can now be heard as segmental subsets of the series.[6] They thus relate to each other not as functional harmonies within a traditional progression, but rather through their intervallic associations—as equivalent members of a single set-class.[7]

In the traditional, tonal interpretation, the non-triadic tones were explained as suspensions. Those same tones, however, can be heard to combine with the triads to form set-classes that also occur as segmental subsets of the series. Example 4a shows the series and identifies a few of its segmental subsets. Example 4b analyzes the triadic passage in terms of the same harmonies. Consider the two forms of set-class 4–22 (0247), in the second and third measures.[8] The first of these

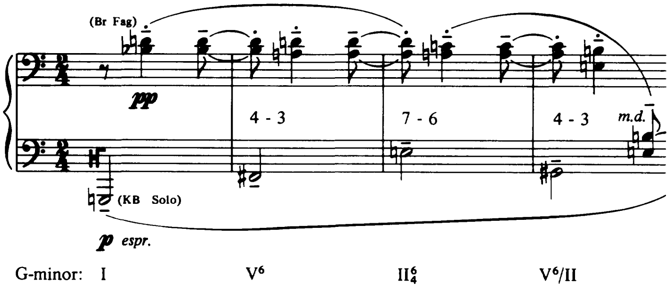
---

[6] A segmental subset is any grouping of notes that are contiguous within the series.

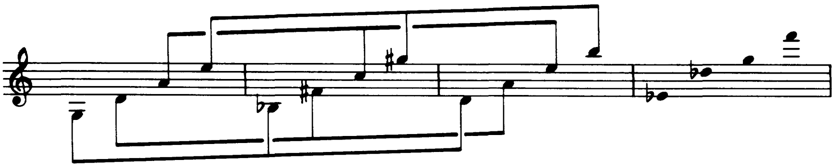
[7] A set is a collection of notes (pitch-classes). A set class is the family of sets related by transposition or inversion.

[8] In this article, as in much of the analytical literature on post-tonal music, pitch-class sets will be identified by both their name and, in parentheses, their prime form. The prime form is a representation of a set in the most condensed possible format, with the integer 0 assigned to one of its notes and the other notes identified by their distance from the 0 counted in semitones. From the prime form, it is easy to grasp the essential intervallic features of a set. All sets with the same prime form are members of the same set class. The name of a set consists of two numbers separated by a dash. The first tells the number of pitch classes in the set; the second tells the position of that set class on a list of set classes compiled by Allen Forte and now widely in use (see *The Structure of*

EXAMPLE 1. Berg, Violin Concerto, opening (Copyright 1938 by Universal Edition. Copyright renewed. All rights reserved. Used by permission of European American Music Distributors Corporation, sole U.S. and Canadian agent for Universal Edition.)



EXAMPLE 2. Arpeggiated figures in solo violin.



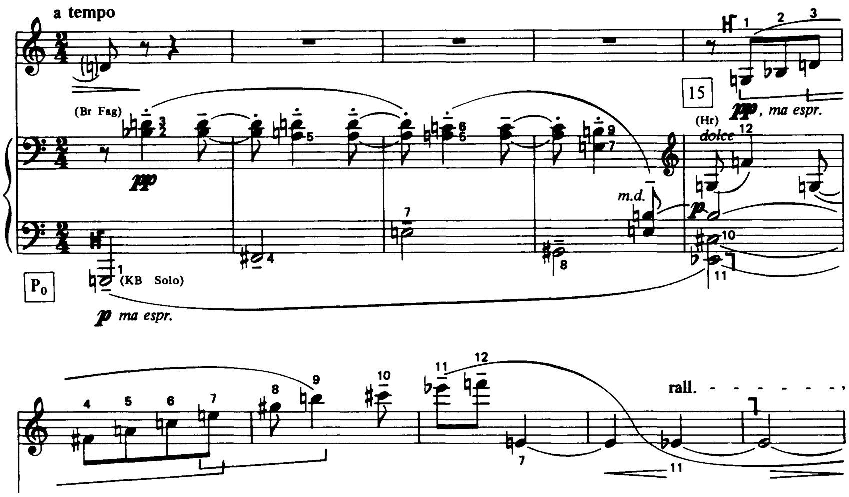
contains the F♯ and E in the bass and the sustained A and D in the treble. The second contains the bass E and three treble notes: A, C, and D. Neither circled collection is a segmental subset of P_0, but both represent a set-class, 4–22, that is formed as a segmental subset of the series. Instead of hearing triads and non-harmonic tones, we now hear independent harmonies and set-class associations among the segmental subsets of the series.[9] In this way, the succession of triads is

---

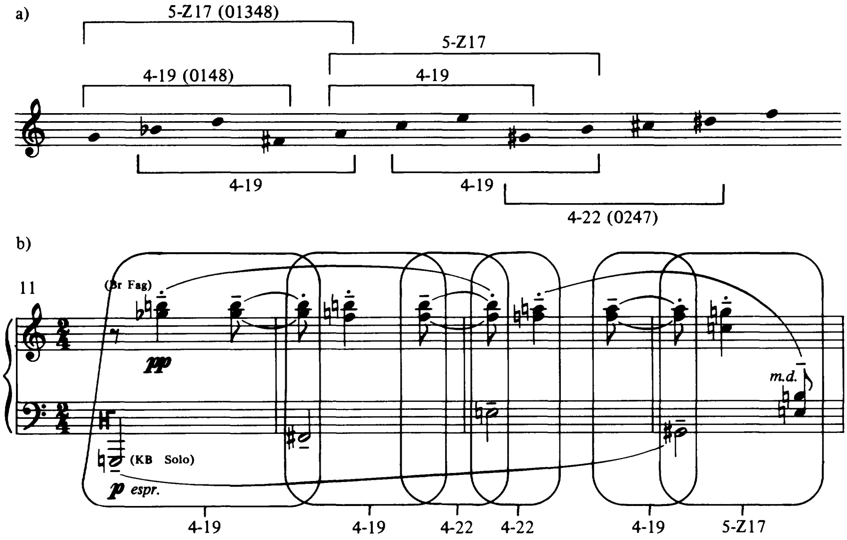
Atonal Music (New Haven, 1973), Appendix 1). Set-class 4–22, for example, is the twenty-second on Forte's list of four-note set-classes.

[9] This attention to the harmonies formed by non-harmonic tones is urged by Schoenberg in his *Theory of Harmony*. He argues that, in a tightly constructed piece, no sonority can be irrelevant to the structure and, therefore, that sonorities formed by non-harmonic tones must be taken seriously as harmonic events: "I believe now I have shown that these combinations are neither any more accidental nor necessarily any less influential than the chords of the system, that neither the historical evolution nor the treatment observable in the literature determines their harmonic significance. I have also shown that they would not belong in the study of harmony if they were non-harmonic, and I can now surely come to the conclusion that: *There are no non-harmonic tones, for harmony means tones sounding together.* . . . Non-harmonic tones are merely those that the theorists could not fit into their systems of harmony." *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Roy Carter (Berkeley, 1978), p. 317.

EXAMPLE 3. Solo violin's first statement of 12-tone series.


a tempo
(Br Fag)
pp
(KB Solo)
p ma espr.
P0
15
(Hr)
dolce
pp, ma espr.
m.d.
p
rall.

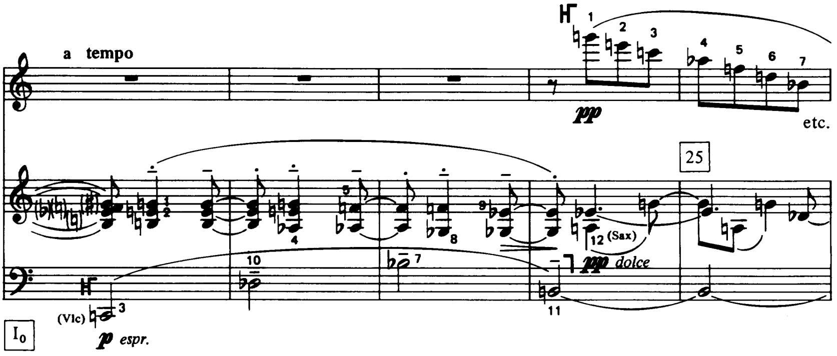
EXAMPLE 4. a) The series and several segmental subsets; b) analysis of triadic passage.


a)
5-Z17 (01348)
5-Z17
4-19 (0148)
4-19
4-19
4-19
4-22 (0247)
b)
11
(Br Fag)
pp
(KB Solo)
p espr.
m.d.
4-19
4-19
4-22
4-22
4-19
5-Z17

denied its traditional sense. The rich twelve-tone construction reshapes its meaning.

In the passage shown in Example 5, the triads are heard in pitch-class inversion. The ordering is somewhat free, but the music is clearly derived from I_0, a linear statement of which is heard in the solo violin. The rhythms and textures of Example 1 are preserved, as is much of

EXAMPLE 5. Inversion.



the set structure, since these elements can remain invariant under inversion. But the functional relationships among the triads are entirely overthrown. At the beginning of Example 1, it sounded as though a tonic were moving to a dominant. When those measures are inverted, as they are in Example 5, no functional relationship can be inferred—the inversional symmetry neutralizes the tonal functions. The traditional meaning is literally turned upside down.

The twelve-tone network redefines the triads, but it by no means obliterates them. The triads lie within the twelve-tone frame, but simultaneously point outside it, back toward the world of traditional tonality. There is thus an irreconcilable conflict in this work—a conflict between the traditional formations and the post-tonal context that subsumes them.

The situation in Berg's Violin Concerto, where traditional musical elements are incorporated and redefined, is reasonably common in twentieth-century music. What we need now is a critical framework for understanding this sort of thing. The framework we need should, above all, be sensitive to the tension in these works between the traditional elements and the new musical context that transforms them.

The outlines of an appropriate critical framework can be found in the work of the literary critic Harold Bloom.[10] Three aspects of his theory of poetic influence have particular relevance for the study of twentieth-century music. The first—one that Bloom shares with other post-structuralist critics—is an idea of intertextuality. For Bloom, a poem is not a self-contained, organic whole; rather, it is a relational

---

[10] The brief summary that follows was written for those who may still be largely unaware of Bloom or his work. It is based primarily on a tetralogy of works: *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford, 1973), *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford, 1975), *Kaballah and Criticism* (New York, 1983), and *Poetry and Repression: Revisionism from Blake to Stevens* (New Haven, 1976).

event, embodying impulses (often contradictory impulses) from a variety of sources. Second is an idea about the ambivalence a poet may feel toward an overwhelming and potentially stultifying tradition. This is the anxiety of influence—a fear of being swallowed up or annihilated by one's towering predecessors. And, while this anxiety is often focussed on a single predecessor or work, it may also be felt with regard to an earlier style.[11] For Bloom, the history of poetry is the story of a struggle by newer poems against older ones, an anxious struggle to clear creative space. Third is an idea about how later poems transform earlier ones. For Bloom, the struggle between newer poems and older ones takes the form of misreading.

Each of these ideas—intertextuality, anxiety, and misreading—are relevant to a study of twentieth-century music. Let me discuss them one at a time, beginning with Bloom's attack on the notion of the poem as an organic whole. For Bloom, to put it most simply, there is no such thing as a poem. Objects that appear to be self-contained are in fact "relational events or dialectical entities, rather than free-standing units."[12] A poem is "a psychic battlefield"[13] upon which a poet and his or her predecessors struggle, like Jacob wrestling with the Angel:

> Let us give up the failed enterprise of seeking to 'understand' any single poem as an entity in itself. Let us pursue instead the quest of learning to read any poem as its poet's deliberate misinterpretation . . . of a precursor poem or of poetry in general.[14]

Of course, traditional theories of poetry acknowledge that a poem may contain conflicting elements. For Bloom, however, a poem is not necessarily concerned with achieving, or even striving toward, unity.

---

[11] Bloom attempts to distinguish between the anxiety of influence and the anxiety of style. The anxiety of style is a more general phenomenon: it refers to a feeling that some past era, as a whole, represents a never-to-be-reattained artistic pinnacle. Anxiety of influence, on the other hand, concerns a relationship between a piece and some predecessor piece. It refers to specific structural features of the two works and specific strategies by which the later work comes to terms with the earlier. In theory, the two types of anxiety are reasonably distinct—Bloom claims not to be concerned with anxiety of style—but, in practice, they are closely related. Anxiety of style is the more inclusive concept. An artist can respond to generally shared attributes of an earlier style without invoking a specific earlier work, but any attempt to misread a specific earlier piece will inevitably also involve misreading elements of an earlier style. Bloom's own work focusses on the anxiety of influence, but is rich in implications for the anxiety of style as well. While the present article is more concerned with the anxiety of style, anxiety of influence can also be traced in twentieth-century music. See Straus, *Remaking the Past.*

[12] Bloom, *Kaballah and Criticism,* p. 106.

[13] Bloom, *Poetry and Repression,* p. 3.

[14] Bloom, *Poetry and Repression,* p. 25.

A poem, for Bloom, is good or "strong" in proportion to the intensity of the struggle it embodies: "Poems are actually stronger when their counterintended effects battle most incessantly against their overt intentions."[15]

Twentieth-century works often incorporate traditional elements that are structurally distinct from the prevailing musical syntax. Such works truly are relational events as much as they are self-contained organic entities. Our understanding of them will be enriched if we can fully appreciate their clash of distinct structures. Music analysis is usually concerned—some would say obsessed—with demonstrating musical unity.[16] Bloom encourages us to shift our focus instead to the tensions and conflicts within a work. In many early twentieth-century works, there is a clear delineation of old and new elements. Old and new are not reconciled or synthesized, but locked together in conflict. The coherence of such works is won through a continual struggle.

Bloom's second idea, that poets feel anxiety toward their towering precursors, is also appropriate for early twentieth-century music. Bloom's account of a poem's struggle to clear space for itself has particular resonance:

> Poems fight for survival in a state of poems, which by definition has been, is now, and is always going to be badly overpopulated. Any poem's initial problem is to make room for itself—it must force the previous poems to move over and so clear some space for it. A new poem is not unlike a small child placed with a lot of other small children in a small playroom, with a limited number of toys, and no adult supervision whatever.[17]

Music is disseminated by performance, and performing repertoire has changed very slowly in this century. The musical canon solidified much later in music than in literature or the visual arts, but by the end of the nineteenth century, it was firmly entrenched, holding firm sway over both the concert repertoire and the musical imagination. As a result, modern music found itself in a losing battle for access to a public. In that sense, the struggle to clear creative space takes on an almost literal meaning in music. To gain access to a public, modern composers have sought musical ways of pushing their classical predecessors aside.

---

[15] Bloom, *Map of Misreading*, p. 19.

[16] Joseph Kerman, in "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out," *Critical Inquiry* VII/2 (1980), 311–31, offers a critique of what he calls "the ideology of organicism" in music theory and analysis. See also his *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), particularly pp. 64–90.

[17] Bloom, *Map of Misreading*, p. 9.

Bloom's third idea, his concept of misreading, is also powerfully relevant to twentieth-century music. For Bloom, a misreading is a particularly powerful form of interpretation in which the later poet asserts freedom from the domination of a precursor by revising or transforming the precursor's work. To read is to be dominated; to misread is to assert one's own priority. The later poet makes the earlier poet say what the later poet wants or needs to hear. For Bloom, a misreading is *not* a failed or inadequate interpretation. In fact, misreadings are usually the most interesting interpretations. A misreading is distinguished from a simple reading precisely by its power to revise.

Composers misread their predecessors in a variety of ways, both in their analytical writings and, more significantly, in their compositions. Bloom has tried to provide for poetry what he calls a "map of misreading." This map includes a series of what he calls "revisionary ratios," or strategies that later artists use to reinterpret their predecessors. An analogous map of musical misreading would be a guide to compositional practice; it would trace the strategies composers use to transform traditional music. I can't present an entire such map here, but it would certainly contain revisionary strategies like the ones Berg uses to neutralize the triads in his Violin Concerto.[18] In what follows, I want to look briefly at several additional works that grapple with, and misread, salient aspects of traditional tonal music. I will be particularly concerned with misreadings of the traditional sonata form, and of structural motion by perfect fifth.

Bartók's Piano Sonata is his first essay in sonata form. Bartók simultaneously follows the traditional formal plan and challenges it, most radically in the recapitulation. There, the second theme makes an extraordinary attempt to break free of the gravitational pull of the first. This attempt is suppressed, but the victory of the first theme is equivocal. The traditional order of things is reimposed uneasily and insecurely.

The occurrences of the second theme—three times in the exposition and once in the recapitulation—are shown in Example 6. As the music unfolds, the second theme is transposed in a highly significant way, through a sequence of ascending perfect fifths. If we call the first T_0, the second is a perfect fifth higher (T_7) and the third is a perfect fifth higher than the second ($T_{7+7} = T_2$).[19] This pattern of ascending fifths, set in motion in the exposition, continues in the recapitulation, where it threatens to rupture the boundaries of the sonata form.

---

[18] For a complete map of musical misreading for twentieth-century music, see Straus, *Remaking the Past.*

[19] A sequential series of transpositions like this is what Paul Wilson calls "a privileged pattern." Wilson shows that these patterns are a reasonably common large-scale strategy in Bartók's music. See *The Music of Béla Bartók* (New Haven, forthcoming).

In a traditional sonata, the second theme in the recapitulation is adjusted to the tonal level of the first. In Bartók's Piano Sonata, however, the second theme returns a perfect fifth higher than its last occurrences in the exposition ($T_{7+7+7} = T_9$), picking up the transpositional scheme of ascending fifths right where it left off in the exposition. The second theme thus attempts to continue blithely on its course, as though the first theme required no concession. After reaching T_9, it threatens to continue chugging along, upward by fifth, indefinitely.

This sequential pattern has powerful and potentially disruptive implications for the form as a whole. It cuts across the traditional formal boundaries and confers upon the second theme a degree of structural autonomy that is not normally possible within a closed form like the sonata. This second theme refuses to accommodate itself to the demands of the first and insists on going its own way. Strong action is required to prevent that from happening. As the movement draws to a close, the first theme asserts its priority in a series of increasingly violent outbursts. In the end, the second theme is adjusted, painfully and insecurely, to the transpositional level of the first.

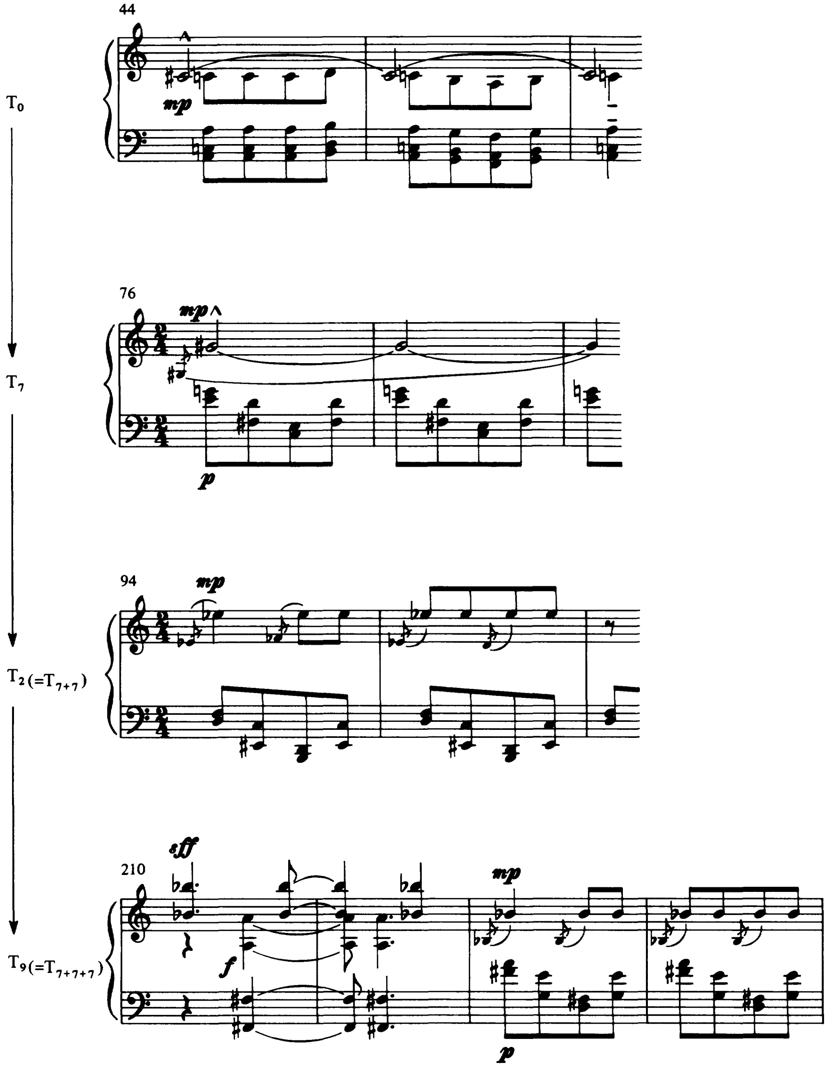
There are two essential misreadings at work here. The first has to do with the formal role of a sonata recapitulation. Traditionally, the recapitulation is supposed to resolve an underlying polarity, to create a sense of reconciliation, a restoration of wholeness. Bartók's recapitulation, however, is a scene not of reconciliation, but of brutal suppression. The formal, thematic outline of the sonata form remains intact, but now contains a disruptive struggle, one with after-effects that linger until the end of the work and beyond.[20] It is striking that the agent of the disruption is the series of transpositions by perfect fifth. Motion by perfect fifth, after all, is what generates the traditional sonata form.[21] In Bartók's second misreading, the same motion,

---

[20] In a somewhat different context, Marianne Kielian-Gilbert refers to this kind of phenomenon as a "layering of coexistent designs." See "Stravinsky's Contrasts: Polarity and Continuity in his Neoclassic Music" in this issue.

[21] "The exposition of a sonata form presents the thematic material and articulates the movement from tonic to dominant in various ways so that it takes on the character of a polarization or opposition. The essential character of this opposition may be defined as a large-scale dissonance: the material played outside the tonic (i.e., in the second group) is dissonant with respect to the center of stability, or tonic. Sonata style did not invent this concept of *dissonant section,* but it was the first style to make it the generating force of an entire movement." Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms* (New York, 1980), p. 222.

EXAMPLE 6. Bartók, Piano Sonata. © Copyright 1927 by Universal Edition. Copyright renewed. Copyright and Renewal assigned to Boosey & Hawkes, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.



extended into a series, violates the unity and integrity of the form, threatening to shatter the vessel that contains it.

The sonata form traditionally holds out the promise of reconciliation and closure. In the coda to the first movement of Stravinsky's

Symphony in C, however, as in the Bartók Sonata, we find a scene of tension instead of reconciliation, violent openness instead of gentle closure. Stravinsky challenges the form even as he employs it.

As has been widely observed, a polarity of two pitch centers, C and E, and of two triads, C-major and E-minor, plays the central form-generating role in this work.[22] Example 7 gives a summary of the principal centric moves in the exposition. From a first theme centered (somewhat ambiguously) on C, the exposition moves through a second theme on F to its conclusion on E. Notice that this large-scale motion composes-out the opening motive of the piece. That motive, B–C–G, is shown in Example 8. In the large-scale statement in Example 7, the motive is transposed and in retrograde. The exposition as a whole thus poises the initial C against the concluding E. C and E balance one another at opposite ends of a large-scale motivic statement.

The polarity of C and E is not fully resolved during the recapitulation. The coda, however, does make an attempt to resolve it in favor of C. As shown in Example 9, beneath a repeated, and tonally ambiguous, E–G dyad in the inner strings, cellos and bassoon establish a final-sounding C, as the movement draws to its close. The ambiguous accompanying figure now sounds like simply part of a C-major triad. The polarity seems to have been resolved in favor of C.

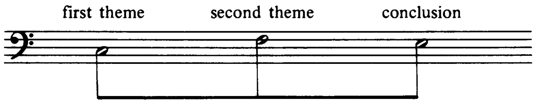
But the movement does not end at that point; it ends with the explosive alternation of the two chords shown in Example 10. These chords intrude abruptly on the tranquility of what had seemed a definitive close on C. They rupture the closed boundaries of the traditional form. In the final chord, containing the notes C, E, G, and B, the central polarity is dramatically crystallized. Its lowest notes, E and G, recall that familiar and ambiguous accompanying figure. In the motive of Example 8, the B and C were heard in an ambiguous linear relationship—what Cone calls the tendency of B to act as a dominant of E rather than a leading-tone to C.[23] Now, in the final chord, B and C are heard as a simultaneity, precluding forever any chance of resolving that ambiguity. The final chord thus compresses, in a single sonority, the duality of C and E and of C major and E minor. The promise of reconciliation held out by the traditional form is thus rudely denied at the last moment by the polarity-charged final chords.

---

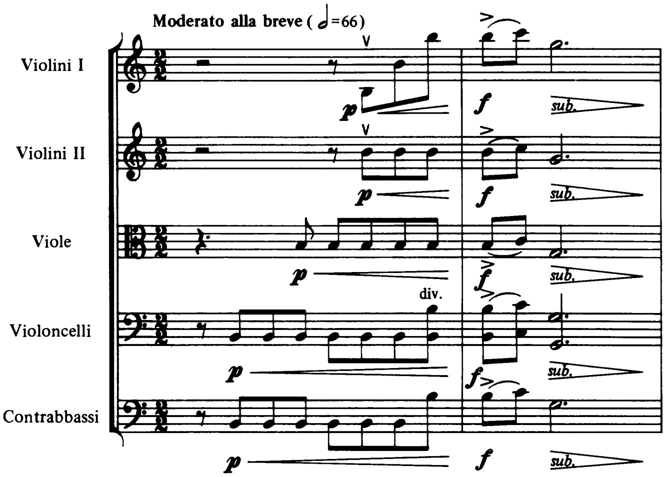
[22] See, for example, Edward Cone, "The Uses of Convention: Stravinsky and His Models," *Stravinsky: A New Appraisal of His Work,* ed. Paul Henry Lang (New York, 1963), pp. 21–33 and Joseph N. Straus, "Sonata Form in Stravinsky," *Stravinsky Retrospectives,* ed. Ethan Haimo and Paul Johnson (Lincoln, NE, 1987), pp. 141–61.

[23] Cone, "The Uses of Convention," p. 26.

EXAMPLE 7. Stravinsky, Symphony in C; principal centric moves in exposition.

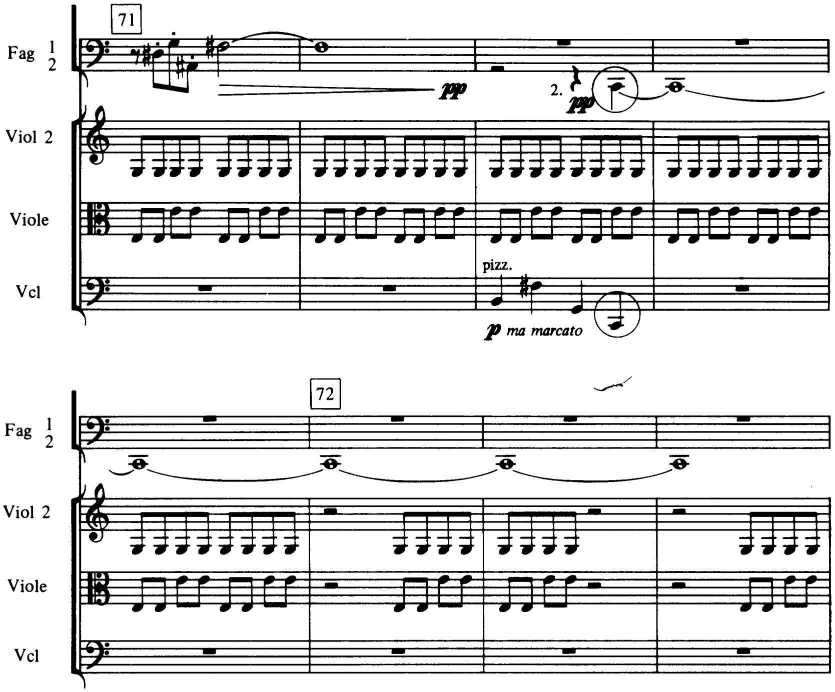


EXAMPLE 8. Stravinsky, Symphony in C; opening motive. © Schott and Co. Ltd., London 1948. © Renewed. All rights reserved. Used by permission of European American Music Distributors Corporation, sole U.S. and Canadian agent for Schott London.



It is here, at the end of the movement, that the tension between the traditional form and Stravinsky's musical syntax is felt most acutely. Stravinsky's tonal polarity is powerful enough to endow the traditional form with new meaning. Indeed, it is powerful enough ultimately to thwart the fundamentally closed nature of the form. The traditional sonata recapitulation promises reconciliation. Stravinsky's sonata defers that reconciliation until the coda, and then ultimately denies it altogether. Like Bartók, Stravinsky attacks the closed nature of the form, its traditional tendency toward structural unity. If the traditional form can be said to be about the possibility of organic unity, of a wholeness that transcends sectional boundaries, of a oneness in which all conflicts are resolved, then the sonata forms of Stravinsky and Bartók are about the impossibility of those things. Instead of a seamless unity, Bartók and Stravinsky offer us irreconcilable tension and conflict.

EXAMPLE 9. Stravinsky, Symphony in C; strings, bassoon, establish final-sounding C. Used by permission of European American Music Distributors Corporation, sole U.S. and Canadian agent for Schott London.

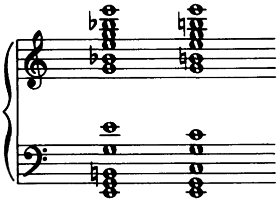


Let us consider now one final misreading which, like the Bartók Piano Sonata, involves structural motion by perfect fifth. The large-scale organization of Schoenberg's twelve-tone music is defined in part by the motion from one combinatorial area to another. Each area consists of four series forms—a combinatorially-related pair and their retrogrades.[24] In the case of the Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 4, P_0, I_5 and their retrogrades constitute a single area, A_0. The work "modulates" from area to area, creating a sense of harmonic motion at the highest levels of structure.

---

[24] The concept of twelve-tone areas is developed in studies by David Lewin. See "Inversional Balance as an Organizing Force in Schoenberg's Music and Thought," *Perspectives of New Music* VI/2 (1968), 1–21; "*Moses und Aron:* Some General Remarks, and Analytic Notes for Act I, Scene I," *Perspectives of New Music* VI/1 (1967), 1–17; and "A Study of Hexachord Levels in Schoenberg's Violin Fantasy," *Perspectives of New Music* VI/1 (1967), 18–32. Milton Babbitt draws a useful analogy between tonal regions and twelve-tone areas in *Milton Babbitt: Words About Music,* ed. Stephen Dembski and Joseph N. Straus (Madison, WI, 1987), p. 52.

EXAMPLE 10. Stravinsky, Symphony in C; alternation of two chords.

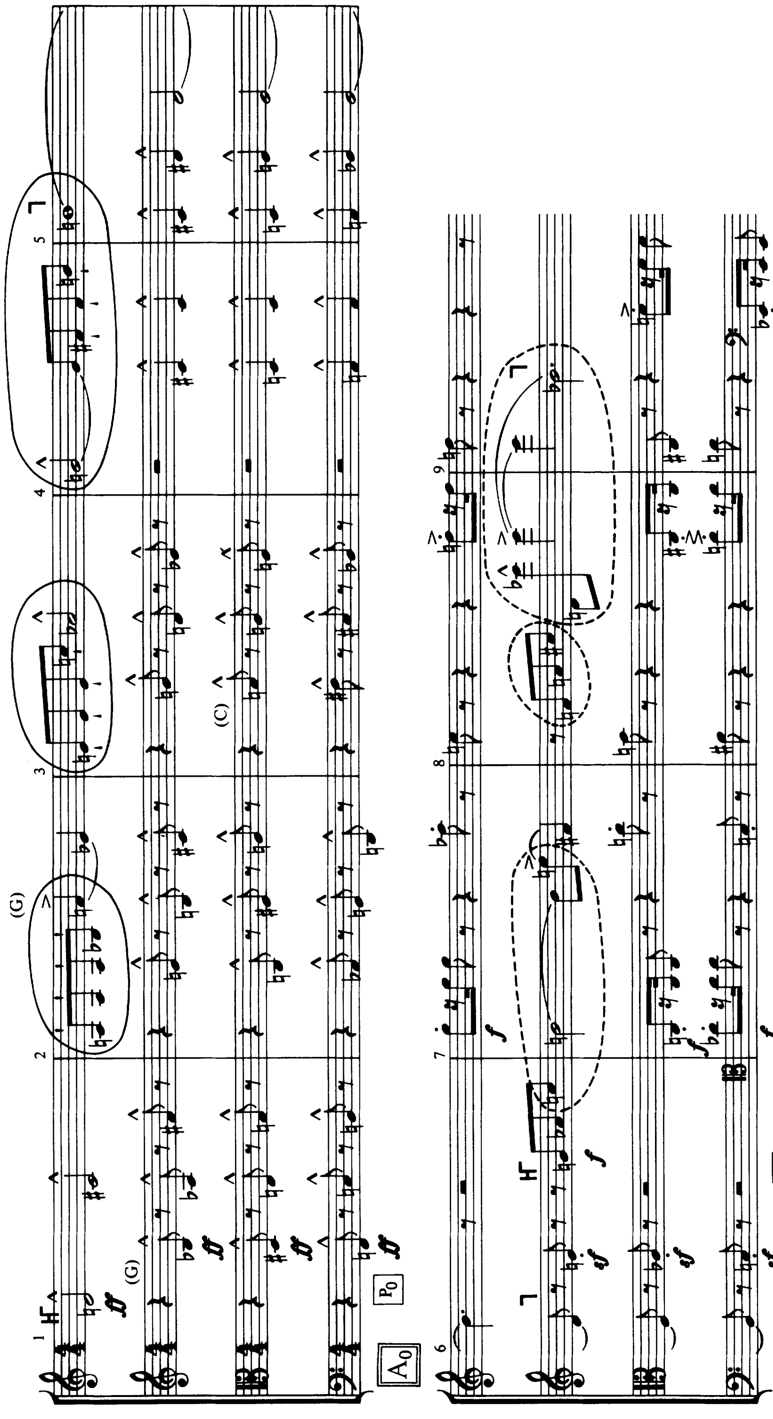


The large opening section of the work presents two contrasting themes. The first is entirely in A_0, as indicated in Example 11. After a transitional section that passes through A_5 (among others), a contrasting second theme occurs in A_7. This large-scale progression from A_0 to A_7 is richly motivated in contextual twelve-tone terms. At each stage in the progression, there are significant invariants that tie the music to what came before and point ahead to the next move. A few of the threads in this rich fabric are shown in Example 11. The second theme thus occurs in A7 as a result of idiomatic twelve-tone processes.

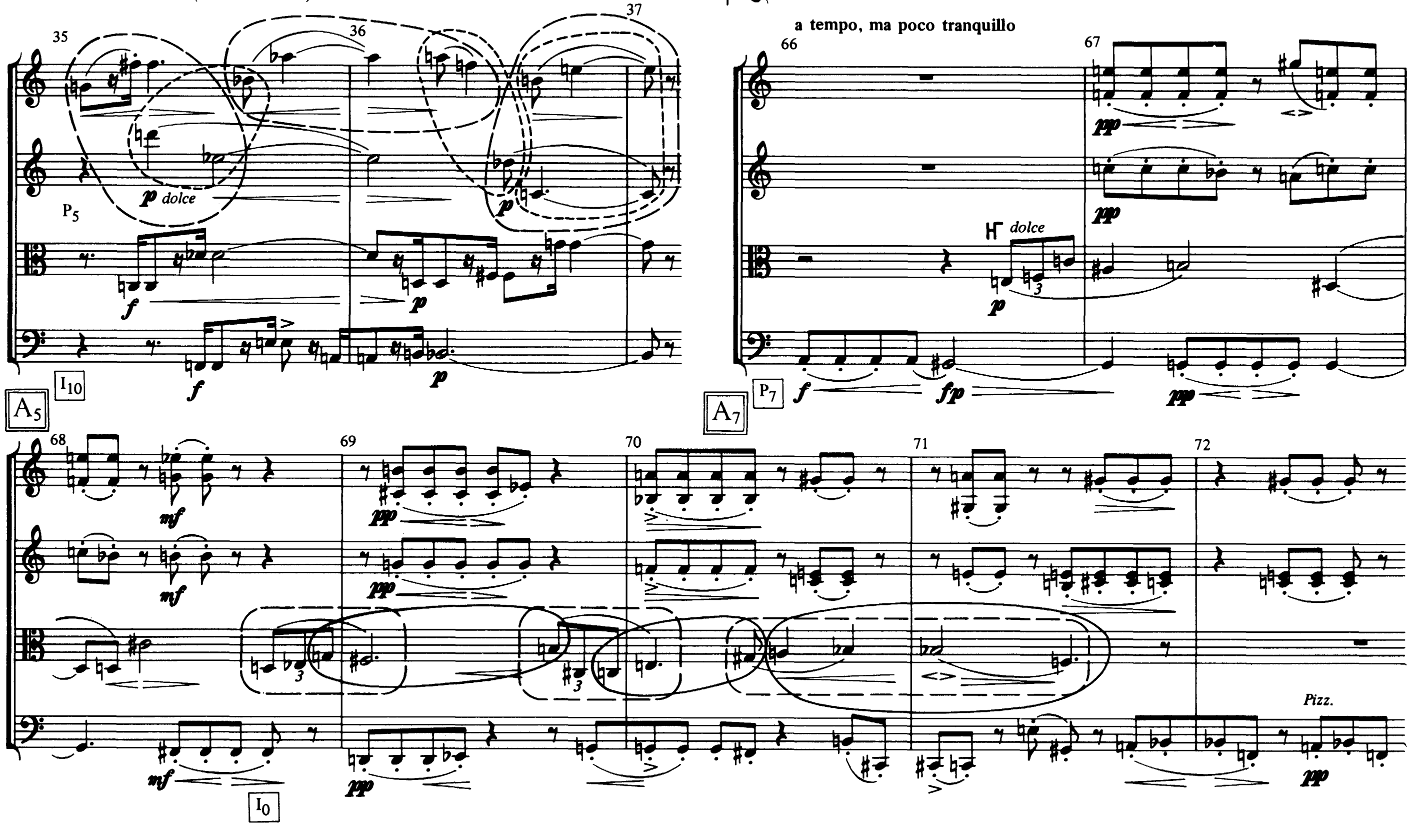
At the same time, there is an obvious allusion here to the traditional motion from tonic to dominant. However, as with the triads in the opening of Berg's Violin Concerto, the traditional meaning of that perfect fifth is neutralized. The result is a kind of deep-level musical pun: the motion from A_0 to A_7 recalls traditional motion from tonic to dominant, but is more richly understood in terms of the contextual twelve-tone organization. Schoenberg uses that organization to undercut and ironically comment on the tonal conventions he appears to invoke. The large-scale motion from first to second themes may look like motion from tonic to dominant, but in this piece, it does not function that way. Schoenberg has used his post-tonal resources to mimic a tonal procedure. The result is a music with tension at its core—tension between the traditional references and the new context that subsumes and redefines them. Schoenberg is demonstrating the power of his music simultaneously to create coherence and to comment ironically on the conventions of the past.

Music in the first half of the twentieth century is shot through with allusions to the music of the past. Some allusions are overt, in the form of direct quotations or references, while others are concealed beneath the surface. They penetrate all levels of structure, up to entire forms and piece-spanning motions. They are too numerous, too pervasive, too characteristic of twentieth-century music to be explained away as anomalies. They cannot be ignored. They demand systematic explanation.

EXAMPLE 11. Schoenberg, String Quartet No. 4, mm. 1–9, 35–37, 66–72. Copyright, 1939, by G. Schirmer, Inc. Copyright renewed. International Copyright secured. Used by permission of G. Schirmer, Inc.


A$_0$
P$_0$
I$_5$
(G)
(G)
(C)
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
ff
sf
f

EXAMPLE 11. *(continued)*


35
36
37
P5
p dolce
f
p
I10
A5
a tempo, ma poco tranquillo
66
67
dolce
p
f
fp
pp
P7
A7
68
69
70
71
72
mf
pp
Pizz.
I0

.... segments shared by A_0 and A_5. ----------- segments shared by A_5 and A_7. ———— segments shared by A_0 and A_7.

To explain them, however, we will have to abandon our cherished notion of a musical unity in which all details are organically linked and all tensions are ultimately resolved. In the works I have discussed here, and in a wide range of twentieth-century music, the tension between traditional elements and post-tonal context is irreducible. That tension is the musical emblem of the anxiety of influence, of the ambivalence composers feel toward dead predecessors outrageously more alive than themselves.

Of course, the music of any era is significantly shaped by the need to come to terms with the music that came before. But the relationship between a music and its predecessors became a matter of particular urgency in the early twentieth century and the strategies of revision took on new forms. First, the historical distance between the new and predecessor works has lengthened considerably. Before the twentieth century, composers were rarely concerned with predecessors beyond one or two generations earlier. Beethoven reacts to Haydn, but he doesn't react to Josquin. Second, prior to the twentieth century, revisions normally took place within a common musical language. When Brahms grappled with the legacy of Beethoven, for example, he did so within the shared norms of common-practice tonality. The revisions I have described today take place across a deep structural gulf. As a result, there can be no easy synthesis, no possibility of an organic oneness in the later work. Above all, twentieth-century revisions reveal the greater sense of anxiety and belatedness felt by twentieth-century composers toward their predecessors. They revise older music as a way simultaneously of establishing a link to the tradition and of lightening its burden on them. Traditional elements are incorporated and reinterpreted, but not effaced. Rather, the past remains a living, forceful presence.

Twentieth-century composers cannot escape their past—it presses in on them in too many ways. They wish to establish links to the tradition, but they know that the lost Eden of the tonal common practice can never be regained in its original fullness. In this postlapsarian world, composition becomes a struggle for priority, a struggle to avoid being overwhelmed by a tradition that seems to gain in strength as it ages. That struggle, and the musical strategies composers use to pursue it, can be felt in a wide range of twentieth-century music. Despite dissimilarities of style, there is a clearly defined mainstream of musical modernism, shaped by common strategies of misreading. By transmuting received materials, composers can push their precursors aside and clear creative space for themselves. In doing so, they remake the past.

Queens College and Graduate Center,
City University of New York