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Art and Cognition: A Methodological Critique of the Pre-Atonal Arnold Schoenberg

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Abstract of the Thesis

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What I will attempt in this essay is to bring the critique to Schoenberg's artistic legacy first on the grounds of the philosophical debate that was going on in those years in the German-speaking world, more specifically between Idealism and Materialism. The second step will be that of bringing the understanding of Schoenberg methods on a cognitive level; and in doing so, I will establish theoretical ties between those philosophical systems and cognitive systems; namely the Cognitivist and the Connectionist approaches. The third step will be that of mirroring the association between the philosophical plane and the cognitive one in the form of aesthetic historical critique – particularly that of Hegel, Lukasz, and Adorno. The last step will be that of applying this philosophical-cognitive-aesthetic framework specifically to Arnold Schoenberg. In doing so, I will ultimately propose a possible methodology which, strongly connected to an historical line of thought, will bare ties with Francisco Varela's theory of Embodied Cognition.

Dedication Page

A mio padre ed a mio figlio Francesco Dante: "...fatti non foste a viver come bruti, ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza".

Dante, *Inferno*, Canto XXVI

Antonio Pellegrino

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A Methodological Critique of the Pre-Atonal Arnold Schoenberg.



I. Introduction

In a short essay written for the *Blaue Reiter Almanac* in 1912 - *The Relationship to the Text* - Arnold Schoenberg explores what he believes is the strength of the artistic language in its autonomy. He starts his argument citing the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer:

“The composer reveals the innermost nature of the world, and expresses the profoundest wisdom in a language that his reasoning faculty does not understand, just as a magnetic somnambulist gives information about things of which she has no conception when she is awake. Therefore in the composer, more than in any other artist, the man is entirely separate and distinct from the artist.”ⁱ

This passage, in Schoenberg's line of thought, underlines the importance of an un-mediated relationship in the creation of any work of art, which communicates in its own terms, in its pure form, afar from any descriptive intellectualization. To be precise: music's potentiality for expression lies in pure musical language - despite any attempt to describe it through rational principles expressed in language, or under the form of an argument. Even when multiple artistic languages presents themselves in one product - i.e. in a musical transposition of a poem, or in an opera – they follow their own logic, and are understandable separately. To this end, Schoenberg reveals how his own understanding of Schubert's *Lieders* was completely disjoint from the significance of the poems on which they were based. He confesses that, even knowing these works very well, he had never attempted to understand their literary texts and that, once he had comprehended them well, his feelings about those songs had not changed. In his own words, Schoenberg writes:

“But when I had read the poems it became clear to me that I had gained absolutely nothing for the understandings of the songs thereby, since the poems did not make it necessary to me to change my conception of the musical interpretation in the slightest degree. On the contrary, it appeared that, without knowing the poem, I had grasped the content, the real content, perhaps even more profoundly than if I had clung to the surface of the mere thoughts represented in words.”ⁱⁱ

In other words, every mode of artistic language is a real expression when purified from all that is unnecessary superstructure, when represents a coherent whole, besides its being part of a larger context. In these statements, Schoenberg’s conception of art - as that of Schopenhauer - seems a quasi-objectivist one, or at least empiricist, if not openly materialist.

However, the most striking fact yet is that in the same text he later assumes a very idealistic position, similar to that of Kandinsky’s spiritualism. He writes:

“One has to hold to what a work of art intends to offer, and not to what is merely intrinsic cause. Furthermore, in all music composed to poetry, the exactitude of the reproduction of the events is as irrelevant to the artistic value as is the resemblance of a portrait to its model; after all, no one can check on this resemblance any longer after a hundred years, while the artistic effect still remains.”ⁱⁱⁱ

That is to say that the work of art loses all of these forced ‘relationships to the text’, becoming self-sufficient and in some extent a-historical. In this section of his short essay, Schoenberg decontextualizes the work of art from any historical and material link to the external world, being the artist the very essence of any artwork. In fact, the second part of the essay becomes an ideological attempt, from the part of Schoenberg, to relate himself intellectually to Kandinsky; and especially to his viewing art as a spiritual activity, in relation to which the material world is only a form of contamination.^{iv}

As Marx wrote, we cannot “judge an individual by what he thinks about himself”^v; and this seems the case for Schoenberg, as probably for each one of us. However, dismissing Schoenberg statements seems to me as easily dismissive and ultimately counterproductive.

Instead, I believe that those two different perspectives on what means to create art can be hold together as different dimensions of the same reality, and that the work of art is a result of both. In that direction, the young Schoenberg's artistic approach offers a very good ground on which a unified reading can be done successively; as the same dichotomy, which I mentioned earlier, appears so clearly intelligible. In addition, the traditional critique toward Schoenberg's work seems shaped by this opposition.

What I will attempt in this essay is to bring the critique to Schoenberg's artistic legacy first on the grounds of the philosophical debate that was going on in those years in the German-speaking world, more specifically between idealism and materialism. The second step will be that of bringing the understanding of Schoenberg on a cognitive level; and in doing so, I will establish theoretical ties between those philosophical systems and cognitive systems; namely the cognitivist and the connectionist approaches. The third step will be that of mirroring the association between the philosophical plane and the cognitive one in the form of aesthetic historical critique – particularly that of Hegel, Lukacs, and Adorno. The last step will be that of applying this philosophical-cognitive-aesthetic framework specifically to Arnold Schoenberg. In doing so, I will ultimately propose a possible methodology which, strongly connected to an historical line of thought, will bare ties with the theory of *Embodied Cognition*.

II. Idealism: Cognitivism = Empiricism: Connectionism

Art

Art

In *The Embodied Mind* (1991), Francisco Varela lays out an historical outline of the development of cognitive science, underlying up to his times the emergence of two main views: *Cognitivism* and *Connectionism*.

Part A – Idealism, Cognitivism, and Art. Varela defines the Cognitivist approach as that in which “[T]he cognitive system projects its own world, and the apparent reality of this world is merely a reflection of internal laws of the system.”^{vi} It seems obvious that the way in which Varela defines *Cognitivism* resembles a very old philosophical line of thought that starts with Plato and arrives all the way to Hegel’s idealism. Being Hegel the ultimate greatest idealist philosopher in Schoenberg’s time, I will use him in order to create the parallels between Cognitivism and Idealism. If we were to compare Hegel’s Idealism to what Varela defines as Cognitivism the resemblance is compelling. Hegel identifies the process of producing reality with the historic becoming of the human consciousness, being the material world the representation of that consciousness. In the *Philosophical Encyclopedia*, Hegel states:

“The concept of the spirit has its reality in the spirit. If this reality is in completed identity with that concept as the knowledge of the absolute idea, then the necessary aspect is that the implicitly free intelligence liberates itself for its concept, in order for it to be a shape worthy of it.”^{vii}

In Hegel’s terms, the knowing subject constructs the world, which in turn becomes a projection of his inner reality. Very similarly, as Varela himself puts it, *Cognitivism* reduces the world to mere ‘mental representation’ in which “the mind is thought to operate by manipulating symbols that represent features of the world or represent the world as being in certain way”.^{viii} In this comparison, the historical line of criticism that considers the work of art as the formalization of the artist’s *Die Geist*, becomes the logical link between Cognitivism and Idealism. In his *Lecture on Aesthetics*, Hegel defines consciousness as the very process of objectivation of the ideal, in which the sensible becomes reality when conforms to the inner ideal of the absolute spirit:

“The very essence of spirit is conformity with itself (self-identity), the oneness of its idea with the realization of the same. It is, then, only in its own world, the spiritual or inner world of the soul, that spirit can find a reality (Dasein) which corresponds to spirit. It is, thus in consciousness that spirit comes to possess its other, its existence, as spirit, with and in itself, and so for the first time to enjoy its infinitude and its freedom.”^{ix}

At the end of the *Lectures*, he extends this concept to the creation of artworks and states:

And, therefore, what the particular arts realize in individual works of art, are according to their abstract conception simply universal types which constitute the self-unfolding Idea of beauty. It is as the external realization of this Idea that the wide Pantheon of art is being erected, whose architect and builder is the spirit of beauty as it awakens to self-knowledge, and to complete which the history of the world will need its evolution of ages.

In addition, if we consider the mind (the brain) as the materialization of the spirit, the link to Cognitivism becomes evident in that the cognitivist hypothesis establishes cognition as the realization (objectification) of mental symbolic codes. Therefore, on the part of the artist, the process of making art becomes that of recovering the equivalent forms of his inner symbolism. After all Hegel attributes to the symbolic nature of art an important role, as largely expressed the *Lectures*.^x In this context, Kandinsky’s *spiritualism* has well established philosophical ties with Hegel’s *idealism*, in which the individual spirit, *die Geist*, ultimately determines reality, creating a subjective world of inanimate objects. In Schoenberg’s times, Idealism and Spiritualism were the latest expression of that line of thought that springs from Plato’s ontology, which attributes to the mind – or the self-determined conscience – the summit of the hierarchical organization of reality.

Part B – Materialism, Connectivism, and Art. Varela, in his historical exposition of cognitive science, determines *Connectivism* as the opposed pole of *Cognitivism*. He defines the connectivist approach in cognition:

“[T]he world out there has pregiven properties. These exist prior to the image that is cast on the cognitive system, whose task is to recover them appropriately”.^{xi}

In this case, the way in which we know and we act is based on an operation of recovering the outer world, which is the only link between the knower and reality. Therefore, the cognitive act is generated by a random connection between an objective reality and a mechanical brain.

On a philosophical level, Connectionism is rooted the empiricist school of thought, to which belong thinkers such as John Locke, David Hume, or Thomas Hobbes. On these grounds, Vienna was an important cultural center as the birthplace of the *Vienna Circle*, active between the first and the second decade of the twentieth century. Self-defined as Positivist and Empiricist, its proponents directed their interest in the purification of scientific knowledge from any form of metaphysics – developing Feuerbach’s materialistic approach.

As the historical epistemologist Wartofsky pointed out, “[I]t is not surprising that the young and brilliant philosophical radicals of the Vienna Circle counted Feuerbach among their spiritual predecessors”.^{xii} Being Feuerbach Hegel’s philosophical nemesis, the relations between *Connectivism* and *Empiricism* seems even more compelling.

In the connectivist logic art becomes the realm of metaphysics, a mere channel for expressing non-objective feelings, a discipline devoid of any real process of knowledge. In the Vienna Circle’s manifesto it is stated:

“The metaphysician and the theologian believe, thereby misunderstanding themselves, that their statements say something, or that they denote a state of affairs. Analysis, however, shows that these statements say nothing but merely express a certain mood and spirit. To express such feelings for life can be a significant task. But the proper medium for doing so is art, for instance lyric poetry or music. It is dangerous to choose the linguistic garb of a theory instead: a theoretical content is simulated where none exists. If a metaphysician or theologian wants to retain the usual medium of language, then he must himself realise and bring out clearly that he is giving not description but expression, not theory or communication of knowledge, but poetry or myth.”^{xiii}

This statement does not come as a surprise if real knowledge excludes any kind of subjectivity, being reality a greater mechanism of which humans are only a part.

Nonetheless, the philosophical and cognitive conception of art in the connectivist-empiricist line of thought is based on an external reality in which beauty is already present; being the task of the artist to recover it from nature. This position is very well articulated in Feuerbach's critique to Hegel:

"Nature has built not only the mean workshop of the stomach, but also the temple of the brain. It has not only given us a tongue whose papillae correspond to intestinal villi, but also ears that are enchanted by the harmony of sounds and eyes that only the heavenly and generous being of light ravishes. Nature opposes only fantastic, not rational, freedom."^{xiv}

This philosophical perspective found its correspondent artistic critique in György Lukács's realism. In being everything originated in the external world, art itself is an operation of recovering objective reality. In fact, in *Realism in the Balance* (1938) Lukács explains this point of view:

"The profundity of the great realist, the extent and the endurance of his success, depends in great measure on how clearly he perceives - as a creative writer - the true significance of whatever phenomenon he depicts."^{xv} Lucaks on Bloch

"What matters is that the slice of life shaped and depicted by the artist and re-experienced by the reader should reveal the relations between appearance and essence without the need for any external commentary."^{xvi} Lucaks on Bloch

These passages resembles very closely Schopenhauer's conception of Art, to which Schoenberg refers in the beginning of *Relationship to the text*.^{xvii} Moreover, the Adorno, in an essay on Berthold Brecht, well defines the realist concept of art:

"The imagination of the artist is not a creation ex nihilo; only dilettanti and aesthetes believe it to be so. Works of art that react against empirical reality obey the forces of that reality, which reject intellectual creations and throw them back on themselves. There is no material content, no formal category of artistic creation, however mysteriously transmitted and itself unaware of the process, which did not originate in the empirical reality from which it breaks free."^{xviii}
Adorno on Brecht

In conclusion, I think it is safe to say that, from a cognitive standpoint, in the materialistic-empirical-realist understanding of art, the artistic endeavor is that of representing objective reality via unmediated (non-subjective) connections with the material world.

III. Embodied Cognition and Its Philosophical Grounds

In *The Embodied Mind*, Varela defines Embodied Cognition as the middle way between Cognitivism and Connectivism. In doing so he does not say that this middle way is simply a synthesis of the two (or an average), but that to understand the *embodied mind* is to include both at the same time, in a dialectic fashion. In bridging together those two historical schools, Varela explains how both the subjective and the objective nature of cognition are present simultaneously, in a continuous process of feedback and adjustment. In Varela's view both the empirical and the subjective concur inseparably in every process of cognition, with the subjective being contextual, and the objective being relational. In that he strongly advocates for the recovery of commonsense, or as he calls it, "background know-how".^{xix}

On the side of Cognitivism, Varela notes how the chimera of a tout-court system for classifying knowledge has failed. While connectivist approaches failed in that, favoring very restricted areas of knowledge could not produce more than a reductionist epistemological model, strongly dependent on the imitation of external models. Therefore, in Varela's opinion, both those schools produced a contradictory ambiguity where background commonsense "...is left largely at the periphery of the inquiry, with the hope that it will somehow eventually be clarified."^{xx}

Philosophically speaking, Varela rejects both the idealistic-representationist views – more typical of Mitteleuropean philosophy – and the Materialist-Objectivist views – related mostly to Anglo-American schools of thought. He relate himself to the phenomenologist approach of Heidegger or Gadamer, and

more closely to that of Merlau-Ponty, who he considers the first phenomenologist to take scientific research into consideration.

In going back to Schoenberg's times, we can definitely say that he was not a Hegelian, nor a Feuerbachian. Therefore, in what kind of 1800's philosophical tradition could Varela be associated? In determining this, I have to take a step back into the idealism-materialism debate of those times.

Indeed, during the nineteenth century, a philosophical step into consider the non-contradictory nature of the subject-object relation. The ontology of the overcoming of this dichotomy is found in the Marxian critique, which redefines both Hegel's and Feuerbach's philosophy. Before devolving his life to political economy, Marx faced this dichotomy in establishing the understanding of reality as both subjective and objective, in that the positive affirmation of the true is a question that is based simultaneously in the material conditions of life and in the history of human consciousness. In *The German Ideology* (1845), Marx explains his materialist-subjectivism - or objective-idealism – as the momentums in which nature shapes human consciousness, which in turn reshapes nature. This process is not linear but dialectically multidimensional, structuring the historical movements of materially based human consciousness. In Marx's words:

“The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus, the first fact to be established is the physical organization of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature. Of course, we cannot here go either into the actual physical nature of man, or into the natural conditions in which man finds himself – geological, hydrographical, climatic and so on. The writing of history must always set out from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history through the action of men.”^{xxi}

As matter of facts, Marx overcomes the dichotomy between idealism and materialism in bringing forward what Varela has defined as *know-how-based cognition*, in which mind and praxis are inseparable from each other. In the same passage, Marx continues his argument:

“Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce

their means of subsistence, a step that is conditioned by their physical organization. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life.”^{xxii}

On the same plan, Marx philosophical method is that of connecting philosophy with and reality, human consciousness to its own material surroundings. In the same time both human consciousness and the world of objects belong to the social structure of men, in which the production of meaning and the material reproduction are embedded. The individual does not cogitate alone or transform nature in solitude, the objective and the subjective are both determined in the life of the human species in its historical process of developing. As Marx points out:

“The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.”^{xxiii}

The metaphor of the *camera obscura* is very powerful in explaining the objective-subjective nature of human cognition. In *The Body in the Mind*, Mark Johnson explains how reality without meaning (or as Marx would call it, human consciousness) or knowledge without reality (non-contextual knowledge) are insufficient in explaining the processes of human cognition. In fact, to further show the relation between Marx’s explanation of reality and Embodied Cognition, I would like to conclude this section with a Johnson’s quote:

“Meaning includes pattern of embodied experience and preconceptual structures (i.e., our mode of perception or orienting ourselves, and of interacting with other objects, events, or persons). These embodied patterns do not remain private or peculiar to the person who experiences them. Our community helps us interpret and codify many of our felt patterns. They become shared

cultural modes of experience and help to determine the nature of our meaningful, coherent understanding of our *world*.^{xxiv}

IV. Embodied Cognition and Art Criticism

At this point has come the time to reconnect the cognitive and philosophical conceptual structure to aesthetics. This is the reason why I have turned to philosophy in order to have a logical support in establishing a connection between embodied cognition theory and artistic production. We have seen how Idealism and Cognitivism were rooted in the same tradition and how the corresponding aesthetic critique found its grounds in Hegel's conception of art and in Kandinsky's spiritualistic perspective. On the other end, we saw how the materialistic conception of the artwork finds its corresponding voice in Lukasz's objective realism. I have explained why, in my opinion, the philosophical mimesis of embodied cognition can be associated with Marx's conception of human consciousness.

Therefore, the next step is to determine the historical line of critique consistent with both Marxism and embodied cognition. It seems natural at this point to look into the Marxist tradition, but not to the classic orthodox one – as that of Lukasz's – but in what has been considered, in my opinion erroneously, as heterodox Marxism. In relating all this discourse to Arnold Schoenberg, the best example of this subjective-objective critique is that of Theodor Adorno, and more precisely the one of his later days.

In his critique to Lukasz's realism Adorno explains his epistemology of the work of art as neither realist, neither spiritual, but as a dialectical movement between the subjective and the objective:

“...the content of works of art is not real in the same sense as social reality. If this distinction is lost, then all attempts to provide a real foundation for aesthetics must be doomed to failure. But artistic appearance, the fact that art has set itself apart in qualitative terms from the immediate actuality in which it magically came into being, is neither its ideological Fall nor does it make art an arbitrary system of signs, as if it merely reproduced the world without claiming to possess the same immediate reality. Any view as reductive as this would be a sheer mockery of dialectics.”

The artistic production is here understood as the dialogue between nature and human nature, between the objective reality and the subjective relationships to it, both from the part of society and that of the individual. In this, Adorno's position is the most coherent with Marx's philosophical structure, therefore the most interesting from a cognitive point of view. In addition, one of the best example of Adorno's aesthetic critique is the study of Arnold Schoenberg's musical career; and that is why I will reconnect all of my argument with the aim of his critique - in the attempt to structure an embodied cognitive reading of Arnold Schoenberg.

V. Back to Schoenberg

As showed in the beginning of this essay, a contradiction emerges within Schoenberg's description of his methodological approach. The duplicity between author and matter, subject and object, does not find a resolution. In fact, a materialistic description of the artistic endeavor as an operation of recovering beauty from the external reality gives way, toward the end of the essay, to a more idealistic and spiritual connotation.^{xxv}

In terms of the philosophical debate of the late nineteenth century, Schoenberg's position fluctuates between Feuerbach's objective materialism and Hegel's subjectivist idealism. This text becomes, in facts, almost the literary synthesis of the development of Schoenberg career in time: in developing the twelve-tone technique in a system, the intuitive nature of the early Schoenberg gives way to the rigor of his late years. However, this transition shall not bring us to the conclusion that the early Schoenberg was on the opposite pole, that of a pure empirical approach. In facts, besides his writings, Schoenberg's legacy was that of an artist whose self-empowerment did not consist of an idealistic vision

of the world, nor was it based on an uncritical repetition of traditional musical language. Adorno explains the contradiction between Schoenberg's statements and his artistic production in defining him as a *naïve* artist, beside "the often hapless intellectualizations with which he sought to justify his work". The *naïveté* of which Adorno is speaking of is not a trivialization of his artistic endeavor but the recognition that his musical language was in the same time rational and instinctive, subjective and objective.

In fact, the early Schoenberg, partially self-taught, handles music composition with an objectivist-idealist attitude- to put it like Benedetto Croce - in that his process resembles more that of a dialectical movement between a strong classical background and an intuitive hands-on technique. Moreover, Adorno points out that Schoenberg was indeed "guided by the tide of involuntary musical intuition"^{xxvi}, which makes him a conscious agent whose methodology embraces both the world around him (historically determined) and his subjective understanding of it. Cognitively speaking, Schoenberg's pre-tonal artistic methodology acquires compelling similarities to the epistemology of *embodied cognition*. As Varela would describe it, he represents the paradigm of "how an autonomous system brings forth significance from the background"^{xxvii}. This creation of meaning springs from the capacity of the pre-tonal Schoenberg of manipulating the classical musical language while at the same time preserving the potentialities of his subjective 'will to art' is a cognitive embodied act. He spontaneously reshapes the musical language without denying tonality *a-priori*, in that he is not afraid of altering it by means of his creative intuition.

In the mature Schoenberg instead, the extreme intellectualization brings to the denial of art itself, in that it empowers only this external entity (the system), taking the judgment away from the artist's own hands. It does so in negating the greatest characteristic of artistic production – i.e. the capacity of re-inventing the world through practical and intellectual. Since the creation of a static system determines the loss of a contextual self-critique of the single work, transcending the resolution of internal contradictions into the method. Probably, Schoenberg was intimately conscious of this impasse, and that is why he tried to escape it.

Adorno notices that the same Schoenberg, after the development of the twelve-tone method, attempts to escape his own ideological trap:

“He never, however, made himself completely the slave of his own intention or of objective tendencies. Paradoxically enough, the composer who forcibly organized and coordinated his material, with ever-increasing severity as he aged, in many respects broke through the systematic constraints of the logic he had unleashed.”^{xxviii}

It is for these reasons that the pre-tonal Schoenberg becomes a compelling example of how important is to recognize that the artistic production cannot be reduced to a pure intellectual operation or to an uncritical and empirical manipulation of materials. Instead, the artistic process presents itself as a dynamical system of manual and intellectual acts, an uninterrupted flow of inputs, outputs, and feedbacks. In that, the traditional interpretations of Schoenberg’s work fail: both the uttermost uncritical spiritualistic understanding of his artistic endeavor or the negative realist one, ungenerously dismissing him as a bourgeois idealist. Despite Schoenberg’s intellectual attitude, his pre-tonal works bear the merit of being anything but an intellectualization of the artistic medium; and that the intellectual quality of his *oeuvre* was that of including the negative and the positive, history and subject, the spiritual and the objective. Moreover, Schoenberg’s pre-tonal works are the one that bare this character more genuinely, as Adorno has righteously pointed out:

“The aesthetic subject, like the philosophical subject, having developed fully and in control of itself, cannot stop at that self and its ‘expression’; it must aim at objective authority, as Schoenberg’s bestowing gesture intended from the very first. Yet this authority cannot be derived from mere subjectivity, even if the latter has drawn its sustenance from the entire dynamics of society, unless it is already present in society, from which the aesthetic subject must detach itself today precisely because that substantial content is lacking in society.”^{xxix}

Is not by chance that Adorno identifies his early works as a very compelling example of the unresolved duplicity of Schoenberg’s music between tradition and avant-garde, between instinct and logic, intuition and *praxis*. The young Schoenberg, self-determinately free of any obligation toward

anyone but his critical thinking, becomes the epithet of the free modern artist in that “he was borne along by the language of music, like the speaker of a dialect”.^{xxx}

Right at the time in which *The Relationship to the Text* appeared in the *Blaue Reiter* (1912), Schoenberg started to embrace what in a certain way he was trying to avoid. In other words, he rejects the idealistic determination of classical tonality and musical theory but he reaffirms them in the creation of a fixed method. In fact, of the same year is his melodrama *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), widely recognized as the work that represent the abandonment of any ties to tonality. In addition, the same Adorno underlies how, with the development of the twelve-tone method, he becomes what he above all abolished earlier:

“For, like knowledge, art cannot wait, but as soon as it succumbs to impatience it is trapped. [...] The sectarian stigma that adhered to him and his circle is a symptom of the false transition. His authoritarian nature is so constructed that, having followed musical logic in making himself the principle of all music, he then had to enthrone that principle above himself and obey it.”^{xxxix}

What Adorno is criticizing here is the fact that in creating another kind of harmonic law, he ended up re-establishing the praxis that he most opposed. This process creates a new trap for the artist, because brings back the artistic process to a cognitively abstract operation, avoiding possible internal contradictions present in the artwork, by means of an abstract mental operation. These abstract systems fail in acquiring a crippling static nature and inhibit the very impulse that lead to the creation of these self-sufficient framesets, inhibiting the freedom of relationships between sounds, the most important aspect of Schoenberg’s artistic production. It does so in that the development of a new closed-system defies the purpose of denying classical tonal harmony. In the same way in which Hegel negated the *absolute* of religion only to transfer it to the State. Adorno underlines as:

“Nothing spiritual has ever escaped this fate since Hegel, perhaps because non-contradiction can no longer be attained in the self-satisfied realm of the mind, if indeed it ever could.”^{xxxix}

In that, the idealistic nature of the twelve-tone method becomes clear as it operates a negation of the negation, in the same fashion of the Hegelian rejection of religious consciousness.^{xxxiii} In fact, Schoenberg's first step is to negate the classical tonal theory in order to replace it with free relationships of musical languages (second step), but the next step (third step) becomes that of negating the latter, restoring a new 'musical universal' in the creation of a rigid compositional methodology.

That is why, as well explained in Adorno's critique, there is a significant methodological gap between the pre a-tonal and the dodecaphonic Schoenberg. Moreover, it is exactly in this gap that, in my opinion, a cognitive critique of 'Schoenberg the artist' finds its roots. From this perspective, the creation of a fixed compositional method – Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique – becomes a *cognitivist*-like operation in that re-establishes a computational system of organizing sound that, even being opposed to the tonal theory, re-affirms it in different terms; even farer to intuition (or commonsense) than tonality. Nevertheless, while the tonal system had its objective correspondent in the materiality of the musical instrument and their practical feedbacks - from which it originates - the twelve-tone technique becomes a sublimation of the objective (material) nature of those musical instruments in the *idea*. In taking this step, the negation of their material praxis becomes a result of an abstract compositional act, which finds its form in the computational realm of the pentagram. Contrary to the historical becoming of tonality, the twelve-tone system does not consider the instruments as equally important. They almost become an obstacle to the actualization the intellectual concept. The uncompromising lyricism of *Verklärte Nacht* (1899) becomes a clear example of how *expression* is placed above any stylistic technique. The free flowing of musical figures does not find any obstacle in tonality, nor in atonality. The style is secondary to musical expression, making the form (the material) as the direct becoming of the substance (the soul); and in that there is no hierarchy between the two, there is no submission of the sound (the material) to the concept, neither of the subjective to the objective. No magic formula lays behind the compositional methodology of *Verklärte Nacht*, nor compromise. The work is self-sufficient because does not need to

conform to any external system, does not need to be explained through tonality or atonality. In that, the work becomes the paradigm of independent musical language. As Adorno points out:

“At times, music constructed according to formulas, essentially meaningless, threatens to undo all its sublimation and revert to raw material. Like the dogma of astrologers, which links the movement of the stars to the progress of human destinies while both remain unaffected by the cognitive act and are thus fortuitous, the sequence of twelve-tone events, determined down to its final note, contains vestiges of contingency for lived experience.”^{xxxiv}

Moreover, the passage to a systematic atonality was favored by the acceptance, on the part of Arnold Schoenberg, of his social role as a guiding musical scholar. In doing so, he lost the main attribute that made him important: that of being a composer and a free experimenter. He publicly accepted the role of the academic avangardist, always hunted down by the postulate of innovation.

On the other end, as perceptible in many of his atonal works, Schoenberg tried to escape this role. Probably he chased that freedom in his interest for different artistic medium – i.e. painting and design - where the *naïveté* of his early years can still be freely practiced. Maybe because in other artistic realms that do not belong to music he did not have to defend his own authority. While in the same time, the musician had to carry the burden of the romantic universal genius:

Schoenberg, who resisted all conventions within the sphere of music, accepted the role assigned to him by the social division of labor, which restricted him to the sphere of music. His impulse to go beyond it as painter and poet was frustrated; the division of labor is not to be revoked by the claims of universal genius.^{xxxv}

Notes:

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- ⁱ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), Vol. I, Ch. III, § 52
- ⁱⁱ Daniel Albright ed., *Modernism and Music: An Anthology of Sources*, (Chicago, 2004: University of Chicago Press), pp. 39-42
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Modernism and Music*, 42
- ^{iv} Kandinsky expresses these ideas many times throughout his career as painter and teacher, especially in his 1911 book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.
- ^v Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, (Progress Publishers, Moscow: 1977), preface
- ^{vi} Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind*, (The MIT press, Cambridge, MA: 1991), p. 172
- ^{vii} G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817), Part III: The Philosophy of Spirit, § 553
- ^{viii} *The Embodied Mind*, p. 8
- ^{ix} G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835), Part III - *Of the Romantic Form of Art*
- ^x Hegel refers to the symbolic aspect of art as the very basic historical origin of artistic practices; this view is expressed throughout the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, but more extensively in part I (Of the Symbolic Form of Art).
- ^{xi} *The Embodied Mind*, p. 172
- ^{xii} Marx W. Wartofsky, *Feuerbach*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, MA: 1977), p. 4
- ^{xiii} *The Scientific Conception of the World: The Vienna Circle* (1929), accessible online at <https://sites.google.com/site/gnadav/TheScientificConceptionoftheWorldeng.doc?attredirects=0>
- ^{xiv} Ludwig Feuerbach, *Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy* (1839), accessible online at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/critique>
- ^{xv} Georg Lukacs, *Realism in the Balance* (1938), in: Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukacs, *Aesthetics and Politics*, (Verso Edition, London, UK: 1980), p. 33
- ^{xvi} *Aesthetics and Politics*, pp. 33,34
- ^{xvii} See note 1
- ^{xviii} Theodor Adorno, *Commitment* (1962), in: *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 190
- ^{xix} *The Embodied Mind*, 147
- ^{xx} *The Embodied Mind*, 148
- ^{xxi} Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, Part I, Section A: *Idealism and Materialism*
- ^{xxii} *The German Ideology, Idealism and Materialism*
- ^{xxiii} *The German Ideology, Idealism and Materialism*
- ^{xxiv} Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, (University Of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1990), p.14
- ^{xxv} See notes 1,2, and 3
- ^{xxvi} Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, (Cambridge, MA, 1983: The MIT press), p. 149
- ^{xxvii} *The Embodied Mind*, 156
- ^{xxviii} *Prisms*, 167
- ^{xxix} *Prisms*, 163
- ^{xxx} *Prisms*, 150
- ^{xxxi} *Prisms*, 164
- ^{xxxii} *Prisms*, 163
- ^{xxxiii} The Hegel's philosophical operation to which I refer is rendered very well in the Marx's Feuerbachian critique of the Hegelian dialectics. Marx states that Hegel suppression of the religious conscience is negated again in substituting to it the notion of *absolute spirit*. Marx writes:
- “Hegel sets out from the estrangement of substance (in logic, from the infinite, abstractly universal) – from the absolute and fixed abstraction; which means, put popularly, that he sets out from religion and theology. Secondly, he annuls the infinite, and posits the actual, sensuous, real, finite, particular (philosophy, annulment of religion and theology). Thirdly, he again annuls the positive and restores the abstraction, the infinite – restoration of religion and theology.” K. Marx, *1844 Manuscripts, Third Manuscript*
- ^{xxxiv} *Prisms*, 167
- ^{xxxv} *Prisms*, 169