ABSTRACTION IN J. S. BACH'S "CHACONNE": A MODEL

FOR RECONCILING ARTIST AND AUDIENCE TODAY

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APPROVAL SHEET

ABSTRACTION IN J. S. BACH'S "CHACONNE": A MODEL

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I dedicate this dissertation to Bridget Raley, my wife, partner in ministry, and friend.

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PREFACE

The solo violin works of J. S. Bach defy mastery. In this sense, they are like the Scriptures, which give scholars only a license to learn more. In researching the abstraction of Bach's "Chaconne" from the *Partita No. 2 in D Minor for Solo Violin* (BWV 1004), I have primarily gained a deeper sense of how vast an achievement it is.

I want to thank three professors from my undergraduate years at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, more than twenty years ago. Professor Daniel Rouslin gave me a fresh understanding of the physicality of playing the violin, enabling me to continue my growth as a player to this day. Professor Bruce McIntosh trained me in the techniques of performance practice, helping me understand the influence of dance in performing the "Chaconne." Professor John Peel trained me in music composition, shifting my approach as a performer more to the point of view of the one who crafted music in the first place.

I also want to thank my dissertation supervisor, Professor Mark Coppenger, who trained me in the philosophical tools I needed not only to ground a theory of abstraction appropriately in the literature, but also to strengthen my writing and ministry overall.

Matthew Raley

Chico, California

May 2017

CHAPTER 1

ALIENATION BETWEEN ARTISTS AND AUDIENCES

The Islamic State inflicted two horrific attacks on Europeans in four months. On November 13, 2015, gunmen killed 130 people and wounded 368 others in Paris and its suburb of Saint-Denis. Then, on March 22, 2016, suicide bombers carried out three assaults that killed 32 people and wounded 316 others in Brussels. Both cities were locked down, their citizens terrified. Shortly after each attack, however, prominent musicians went ahead with already-scheduled performances of music by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750).

Ten days after the Paris attacks, pianist Alexandre Tharaud played Bach's *Goldberg Variations* at the Philharmonie de Paris. Despite fears that few would attend, the 2,400-seat hall was full, with 200 people seated onstage around the piano. Lighting came solely from candles. "I think Bach is the only composer to talk directly to people," Tharaud said later. "You can play Bach on every medium—marimba, accordion—and it's beautiful. When I play Bach, my hands feel better, my body feels better, and my heart feels better."[1] In Brussels, the day after the bombings, John Eliot Gardiner led a performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* that was broadcast live on the radio. A press release dedicating the concert to the memory of the victims said, "The *Matthew Passion*, with its message of love and solace, is a powerful symbol. It is precisely in these tragic circumstances when the need for solidarity is at its greatest and when a performance of

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[1]David Patrick Stearns, "Alexandre Tharaud Brings Bach's Healing Power to a Terrorized World," *Philly.com*, April 7, 2016, accessed April 16, 2016, http://articles.philly.com/2016-04-07/news/72105571_1_matthew-passion-john-eliot-gardiner-goldberg-variations.

this unifying piece by Bach is so befitting."[2]

In the last century, musical performances that summoned audiences' fortitude in the midst of violence have not been unusual. In a German prisoner-of-war camp in 1941, Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) premiered his *Quartet for the End of Time* before an audience of about 400 fellow prisoners and guards—outdoors in the winter rain. Violinist Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1999) and composer Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) performed for liberated survivors at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945. When air raid sirens interrupted a concert in Tel Aviv during the Gulf War in 1991, violinist Isaac Stern (1920-2001) played the "Sarabande" from Bach's *Partita No. 2 in D Minor for Solo Violin* (BWV 1004) while the audience wore gas masks.[3] During the shelling of Sarajevo in 1992, cellist Vedran Smailovic played daily at the site of an explosion that had killed twenty-two people, his listeners hiding in doorways.[4]

While a human need for solidarity is stark in moments of duress, the same need has been a focus of the fine arts throughout human history. The need to undergo experiences together with fellow citizens, fellow worshipers, and fellow workers is at least as important to human well-being in the routine of life as it is when bombs are going off. Human beings want to share the meaning of birth, growth, harvest, and health as much as the meaning of national trauma. In transforming meaning from subjective emotion to emotion held in common with others, solidarity was a primary function of the fine arts until modernism.

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[2]"St Matthew Passion Dedicated to Families and Victims of Brussels Atrocity" (Monteverdi Choir and Orchestra, March 23, 2016), accessed April 28, 2016, http://intermusica.s3.amazonaws.com/PDFs/Monteverdi%20Brussels%20press%20release.pdf.

[3]Theodore Bikel, *Theo: An Autobiography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 417.

[4]John F. Burns, "The Death of a City: Elegy for Sarajevo--A Special Report. A People Under Artillery Fire Manage to Retain Humanity," *The New York Times*, June 8, 1992, sec. World, accessed May 5, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/1992/06/08/world/death-city-elegy-for-sarajevo-special-report-people-under-artillery-fire-manage.html.

With modernism, however, an artistic focus on solidarity became troubled by charges of commercialism, appeasement, dishonesty, or collaboration with oppressors. Modernist artworks, even though they are decades old, continue to have a strained relationship with audiences. Many museum visitors stand puzzled before a painting by Mark Rothko (1903-1970) or Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), calculating what price they might get for their five-year-old's drawings. Symphony audiences, opening their programs to discover a work by Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) before intermission, groan at what they suspect will be a fifteen-minute sonic assault before they get to hear Mozart. Decades after modernism began to decline, it can still give offense.

The relationship between the fine arts and their audiences, in a sense, never recovered. Modernists were not merely making provocative work, but often intended to insult their audiences. In 1913, the notorious riot that greeted *The Rite of Spring* by Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) may have been a more violent reaction than he'd wanted, but he did design the primitivism to shock. He was not alone. Artists, composers, and literary figures following Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) targeted bourgeois sensibilities for abuse.[5] Modernists elevated social antipathy to an aesthetic principle. As a result, artistic organizations now labor to overcome audiences' incomprehension, resistance, and even hostility to their missions. In doing so, such organizations try to navigate what they see as the dichotomies of art and commercialism, accessibility and vulgarity, challenging an audience and appeasing it.

Issues

To be sure, tensions between artists and audiences predate modernism. In music, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) successfully transferred his work from aristocratic palaces to bourgeois concert halls, opening art music to a new audience.

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[5]Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) moved his listeners further into romanticism by breaking classical rules in both harmony and form. In painting, pushing boundaries was a constant feature from the Renaissance onward, whether through a technique like vanishing-point perspective or content like Michelangelo's nudes in the Sistine chapel. The fine arts pursue vitality by challenging conventional expectations.

Such tensions, however, were sharpened in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by emerging narratives of the artist's role in society. Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) portrayed the fine arts as crucial in the development of human freedom.[6] Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) viewed the artist not as a mere craftsman, but as a quasi-religious figure who advanced the cognition of society to higher levels.[7] The fine arts became part of the dialectic of Spirit advancing toward greater self-consciousness through culture.[8] Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) saw the artist as a kind of prophet who confronted the masses with spiritual truth, only to be misunderstood and reviled.[9] In the dialectical materialism of Walter Benjamin (1892-1940)[10] and Theodor Adorno (1903-1969),[11] art became a kind of incarnate truth, and artists were accountable to give form to that truth in their work. In these narratives, the measure of an artist's integrity became his dialectical antithesis to bourgeois culture—an antithesis that was to be encoded into the structure of a work at every level. Anything less than total devotion to this task was an unforgivable

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[6]Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004).

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

[8]G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Inwood, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (New York: Penguin Books, 1993).

[9]Wassily Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, ed. Hilla Rebay (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1946).

[10]Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 217–51.

[11]Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster, Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers (New York: Continuum, 2003).

compromise with bourgeois commercialism.

Throughout the modernist era, prominent artists and composers were well aware of the alienation audiences felt and tried to address it. The painter Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), for example, engaged the apprehensions of his viewers directly by publishing a fictional dialogue between a singer with conservative tastes and a painter, representing Mondrian's own views.[12] Mondrian displayed a sincere understanding of the difficulties viewers had when confronting abstract paintings. Composer Aaron Copland addressed the same problem faced by new music in 1941:

> The art of music during the present century has undergone a violent upheaval. Audiences everywhere have shown signs of bewilderment at the variety of styles and tendencies that all pass muster under the name of modern music. Being unaware of the separate steps that brought about these innovations, they are naturally at a loss to understand the end result. Speaking generally, the lay listener has remained antagonistic, confused, or merely apathetic to the major creations of the newer composers.[13]

At a time when his own influence among new American composers was high, and his influence with the public was growing, Copland took to print to explain the musical revolution to ordinary concert-goers.

Even when acknowledging the alienation, however, artists clearly believed audiences were to blame. One notices Copland's use of "apathetic" among his descriptions of listeners above. He went on to say that the revolutionary change in music "has been obvious for some time now, even to the apathetic listener." He said that there were "still some people who have not recovered from the shock" of the sixty-year-old changes. "Music has been changing, but they have remained the same."[14] Copland's posture as a music educator—as if he were anticipating the narrative voice of public

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[12]Piet Mondrian, "Dialogue on the New Plastic," in *Art in Theory, 1900 - 2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 284–89.

[13]Aaron Copland, *The New Music: 1900-1960*, rev. and enlarged ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 9.

[14]Ibid.

broadcasting—was hardly going to sway people who did not already agree. Mondrian was more directly confrontational in his dialogue: "In painting you must first try to see composition, color, and line and not the representation as representation. Then you will finally come to feel the subject matter a hindrance."[15] "Finally" says it all.

These were not the only voices addressing the alienation between artists and audiences in the first half of the twentieth century. There were other artists who rejected the low modernist view of audiences, and who called for deeper consideration of human need and potential. Taking only a few composers as examples, their diagnosis of modernism sounds prophetic.

Ernest Bloch, a composer who drew from the folk elements of central European and Jewish culture, wrote in 1916, "Only that art can live which is an active manifestation of the life of the people." Crowds cannot produce the art, he allowed, but "they must have contributed to its substance" like soil nourishing a deeply-rooted plant. "Art is the outlet of the mystical, emotional needs of the human spirit, it is created rather by instinct than by intelligence, rather by intuition than by will."[16] Bloch criticized the idea of the isolated artist:

> There was a time, however, when men drew inspiration from their daily life and their daily conflicts. Everything had its deep aspect of poetry. But today the artist turns away and avoids what ought to command him. Where he should plunge into life, feel himself impregnate with it, draw forth its essence magnified and ennobled, he prefers to devote his powers to the inventing of an artificial work.

Bloch compared the art produced in isolation to the fate of religion in modern culture: "a dogmatic and desiccated form, remote from nature, morbid, lifeless, a fairy-tale that has lost all its meaning."[17] Amid the violence of World War I, he hoped "that a little true love will be reborn in the withered hearts of men." Such a change would require "new

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[15]Mondrian, "Dialogue on the New Plastic," 285.

[16]Ernest Bloch, "Man and Music," in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 42.

[17]Ibid., 43.

songs."[18]

Bela Bartok (1881-1945) argued that modern compositions could be constructed from the material of folk music. In doing so, he was making more than a nationalist claim. Like Bloch, he believed that art music drew life from the ways of ordinary people, and that this root in culture was the source of artistic vitality. Bartok described how Hungarian composers made collections of folk music by traveling the countryside. He noted that the Russian Stravinsky and the Spaniard Manuel de Falla (1876-1946) may not have traveled to make their own collections, but he was sure that they "must have studied not only books and museums but the living music of their countries." Bartok continued,

> In my opinion, the effects of peasant music cannot be deep and permanent unless this music is studied in the country as part of a life shared with the peasants. It is not enough to study it as it is stored up in museums. It is the character of peasant music, indescribable in words, that must find its way into our music. It must be pervaded by the very atmosphere of peasant culture. Peasant motifs (or imitations of such motifs) will only lend our music some new ornaments: nothing more.[19]

For a folk tune to provide material for a modern composition meant more than mere quotation for Bartok. The composer borrowing a tune, he said, needed to be "bound by its individual peculiarity." "We must penetrate into it, feel it, and bring it out in sharp contours by the appropriate setting." Such compositions were just as much works of inspiration as any other music.[20]

Some modernist composers advocated a more considerate isolation from the concert-going public. Schoenberg, for example, started the Society for the Private Performance of Music in 1918 as a way of working around what Charles Rosen called "the deteriorating relation between the contemporary composer and the public." The

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[18]Bloch, "Man and Music," 47.

[19]Bela Bartok, "The Influence of Peasant Music on Modern Music," in Childs and Schwartz, *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, 73.

[20]Ibid., 77.

Society's concerts usually took place on Sunday mornings without any publicity. Subscribers pledged not to comment publicly or publish reports of any kind. In this way the musicians were "withdrawn from commercial stimulus and from the expectation of fame."[21] The Society closed in 1921 after less than three years, a victim of post-war inflation.[22] Decades later, at the other end of the revolution Schoenberg initiated, American composer Milton Babbitt (1916-2011) said that the "unprecedented divergence between contemporary serious music and its listeners, on the one hand, and traditional music and its following, on the other," was likely "not transitory." He compared the modernist revolution in music to the revolution in theoretical physics.[23] Contemporary music made more demands on both listener and performer because of the rapidity of change and relationship among pitches, the increase in the number of structural functions for any single musical event in a work, the lack of any continuity among works with musical traditions, and the depth of analytical theory behind such works.[24] Babbitt commented,

> Why refuse to recognize the possibility that contemporary music has reached a stage long since attained by other forms of activity? The time has passed when the normally well-educated man without special preparation could understand the most advanced work in, for example, mathematics, philosophy, and physics. Advanced music, to the extent that it reflects the knowledge and originality of the informed composer, scarcely can be expected to appear more intelligible than these arts and sciences to the person whose musical education usually has been even less extensive than his background in other fields.[25]

He recommended a "total, resolute, and voluntary withdrawal from [the] public world to one of private performance and electronic media, with its very real possibility of

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[21]Charles Rosen, *Arnold Schoenberg*, Modern Masters (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), 65.

[22]Ibid., 69.

[23]Milton Babbitt, "Who Cares If You Listen?," in Childs and Schwartz, *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, 244.

[24]Ibid., 245–46.

[25]Ibid., 247.

complete elimination of the public and social aspects of musical composition."[26]

Yet even Schoenberg himself, so often seen as an artistic high priest who isolated himself to serve truth, was not alienated from mainstream society ideologically. He wrote in some detail about his relationship with listeners, expressing optimism about the ability of ordinary people to appreciate his work. It was the critical establishment, the academic elites, and self-regarding concert-goers who were the object of his scorn. His relationship with audiences was more conflicted than the modernist narrative would give us to understand.

His ire directed against the musical establishment is easy to find in his essays. Schoenberg notes that the premiere of *Verklarte Nacht* (like Stravinsky's *Rite*) was greeted with a riot. One critic compared the sextet to "a calf with six feet, such as one sees often at a fair." They were predisposed not to like this relatively conservative piece, no matter how many sweet moments it had.[27] Thus, he was resentful when the same kind of audience applauded "for about half an hour" after the conclusion of his *Gurrelieder* some thirteen years later. The success just underlined how alone he was in the music world. "I had lost friends and I had completely lost any belief in the judgement of friends."[28] Schoenberg blamed one of his most lonely periods, between 1922 and 1930, on the world of music, not on ordinary listeners. It was not the bourgeoisie but composers who, he said, followed such fads as "'Machine Music' and 'New Objectivity' (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) and 'Music for Every Day Use' (*Gebrauchsmusik*) and 'Play Music' or 'Game Music' (*Spielmusik*) and finally 'Neo-classicism'."[29]

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[26]Babbitt, "Who Cares If You Listen?," 249.

[27]Arnold Schoenberg, "How One Becomes Lonely (1937)," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (New York: St. Martins Press, 1975), 30.

[28]Ibid., 41.

[29]Ibid., 52.

When it came to ordinary people who had no advanced training in music, Schoenberg's experience and attitude was different. He deplored composers who pretended to "descend from their heights in order to give some of their riches to the masses." By contrast, he commended others "like Offenbach, Johann Strauss and Gershwin," because their "feelings actually coincide with those of the 'average man in the street'. To them it is no masquerade to express popular feelings in popular terms."[30] Schoenberg also treasured his connections with ordinary people. He was surprised when a drill sergeant in World War I "recognized me, knew my career, many of my works, and so gave me still more pleasure than by praising my drill." A night porter and a taxi driver told him enthusiastically that they had heard the *Gurrelieder*, another hired man recalling that he had sung in the choir during a performance Schoenberg conducted. An elevator operator asked him whether he was the composer of *Pierrot Lunaire*, and went on to describe the effect of the piece when he had heard it years before. Schoenberg commented "that I need not alter what I believe about the semi-ignorant, the expert judges; I may continue to think they lack all power of intuition." The ordinary people, however, were another matter. "Whether I am really so unacceptable to the public as the expert judges always assert, and whether it is really so scared of my music—that often seems to me highly doubtful."[31]

It is hard not to miss at least a claim to solidarity from the high priest of modernism.

The social distancing of artists from audiences, so often demanded by modernism as a proof of integrity, led to another issue in the artworks themselves. Modernist works became known for abstraction, or removal from particularity and

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[30]Arnold Schoenberg, "New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea (1946)," in Stein, *Style and Idea*, 124.

[31]Arnold Schoenberg, "My Public (1930)," in Stein, *Style and Idea*, 98–99.

concreteness. In making visual art, the artist may create a realistic imitation of something in nature, or she may create a non-imitative image that is removed from objects in the sensory world—an abstract image. A composer may write a song—a melody sung with lyrics over a subordinated accompaniment—or a programmatic work like Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* imitating birds, streams, and storms. Both kinds of music would be considered relatively concrete. The composer may also write a twelve-tone string quartet that has no lyrics, no subordinated accompaniment, no programmatic content, and no tonal center—an abstract work. In this sense, an audience's reaction to an artwork often depends on how abstract it perceives the work to be. The abstraction of modernist works is generally agreed to be a barrier to audiences.

This barrier was already implicit to the composers quoted above. Copland was striving to explain the changes in new music, which he acknowledged made works confusing to listeners. Composers were creating music that was more and more removed from the experiences of concert-goers. Schoenberg acknowledged the difficulty of his music both in print and in the creation of his Society for Private Performance. In fact, his disciple Alban Berg (1885-1935) wrote an article entitled, "Why is Schoenberg's Music So Hard to Understand?"[32] Berg argued from Schoenberg's early works that it was the speed of harmonic and rhythmic changes that made his music difficult for listeners. Babbitt, decades later, made a similar argument about new music broadly: it was far more efficient and complex than an ordinary listener could perceive, or even than performers could produce. The abstraction of new music made it more suitable for specialists.

Yet, even though the barrier has been palpable in visual art and music, the very term *abstraction* has been notoriously hard to define. The stark antithesis of the abstract to the imitative expresses where modernist painters ended up, for instance, but ignores

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[32]Alban Berg, "Why Is Schoenberg's Music So Hard to Understand?," in Childs and Schwartz, *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, 59–71.

the process that Kandinsky, Mondrian, and others went through to get there. That process involved many steps away from realism. The concept of an "abstraction ladder" formulated by S. I. Hayakawa[33] might account for such gradations by describing abstraction as increasing generalization from a referent. Still, how might that description apply in art? In a sense, theorists have yet to answer the question Susanne Langer (1895-1985) posed about abstraction in 1964: "Have we not all heard, read, and long believed that concreteness is of the essence in art?"[34] "Abstract" art, she pointed out, seems to be a contradiction in terms. More recently, Hubert Damisch attempted to organize an exhibition at the Pompidou Center to explore "the dispute over abstraction," but his proposal went nowhere. It was "too abstruse."[35] This problem of how to define abstraction remains difficult, even as the fine arts have moved on to conceptual and postmodernist movements.

Here, then, are two questions about the relationship between artists and audiences that are unsettled. First, is there an account of artistic integrity that does not require an artist to alienate audiences in the modernist fashion? In examining this question, issues arise as to whether a Hegelian analysis of artists in society still holds, what role commercialism plays in a work's integrity or lack thereof, and how the purpose of art for contemporary audiences might be reframed. Second, is there an account of abstraction that can equip artists to challenge audiences in the context of a different relationship? This question calls for a closer look at abstraction as it was conceived before dialectical materialism. For example, William Hazlitt (1778-1830) articulated a theory of abstraction that has regained attention in recent decades.[36] Abstraction need not

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[33]S. I. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).

[34]Susanne K. Langer, "Abstraction in Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 22, no. 4 (July 1, 1964): 379.

[35]Hubert Damisch, "Remarks on Abstraction," *October* 127 (January 1, 2009): 133.

[36]Roy Park, "The Painter as Critic: Hazlitt's Theory of Abstraction," *Publications of the*

be conceived in modernist categories.

This study proposes a framework for answering these two questions. It will use J. S. Bach as a model, examining his "Chaconne" for solo violin from the *Partita No. 2*. Bach's career offers insights into how an artist's relationship with audiences might be conceived differently from modernism. At any given time, his audiences comprised aristocrats (Cöthen), worshipers (Mühlhausen), scholars, bourgeois concert-goers (both in Leipzig), or combinations of them all. He was able not only to challenge but also to edify these audiences. Further, the sophistication of Bach's music offers a pre-modernist look at abstraction. The "Chaconne" is one of the most elaborate constructions in Bach's instrumental corpus, and comes from one of the demonstration cycles he composed in Cöthen, designed as a *tour d'horizon* of compositional style, technique, and technology. While Bach's context and worldview came well before the modernist aesthetic developed, he was not pre-modern. Bach engaged with the most potent forces that shaped the modern era philosophically, theologically, socially, and economically.[37]

Furthermore, Bach's worldview has implications for artistic integrity and abstraction. His artistic and theological missions were inseparable. He may have been the most theologically informed composer in the history of Western music, and the one who most consciously integrated his biblical worldview with his art. In fact, to establish the depth of his aesthetic theology in relation to his audiences, this study will compare Bach with his contemporary across the Atlantic, Jonathan Edwards, one of the most aesthetically informed theologians in Western Christianity. Because of Bach's unified worldview, the abstraction in his "Chaconne," as in all his work, was a direct expression of his view of God and the created order. The "Chaconne" was a microcosm of God's

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Modern Language Association 85, no. 5 (October 1, 1970): 1072–81.

[37]Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

creation, in which diversity is integrated as a unified whole. Even further, Bach's worldview informed his role as a composer in relation to his audiences. That role was to refresh audiences with an expression of God's glory. To fulfill this mission, Bach did not merely appease their tastes, but initiated them into a more profound beauty.

There is a model in Bach's example for artists who want to reconcile with audiences after the alienation of modernism. In his model, solidarity in response to violence was not just available, but was cultivated as a daily reality. The gods of artistic integrity did not demand that a composer sacrifice the audience in order to gain acceptance. The artist could challenge his audiences using a nuanced understanding of abstraction rather than abusing them with shock tactics.

Thesis

In considering an alternative account of artistic integrity, two issues require close examination. The first is the definition and nature of the audience. The second is the definition and nature of abstraction.

Bach would not necessarily recognize the term *audience* the way it is used today. Nor would many eighteenth- or nineteenth-century philosophers of aesthetics. The idea that the bourgeoisie at that time would pay to attend a concert of art music or to stroll through a gallery of paintings was new. Eighteenth-century artists would have thought in terms of aristocratic and ecclesiastical patronage, which involved listeners and viewers that were vanishingly small in number but disproportionately large in power. By the turn of nineteenth century, the paying bourgeois audience was growing and would become the dominant reference point for artists. *Audience* would become a controversial term to many twentieth-century thinkers precisely because of its association with the bourgeoisie. Adorno wrote about audiences almost entirely in terms of bourgeois culture, his view of the industry that manufactured content, and his dialectical understanding of history. Clement Greenberg (1909-1994), similarly, wrote of audiences in connection

with his concept of kitsch: they wanted the effects of art, he said, not art itself. It is difficult to align these concepts with the contemporary perspective of a symphony's music director or a museum's public relations manager. The idea of Bach's meeting with the marketing team to plan outreach to younger demographics through social media is farcical. Adorno and Greenberg would view the marketing team as the enemy.

There are several factors to consider in comparing Bach's view of his audiences with the views of later thinkers and artists. First, there are competing ideas of what listeners and viewers need as individuals. Philosophical and theological accounts of personhood, relationship, obligation, and destiny, among many other issues, all affect how artists view the people around them. To trace the development of modernism's alienation, then, this study will contrast the presuppositions that informed Bach's mission as a composer with the categories of Enlightenment rationalism, which gave aesthetic philosophy a focus on humanity that paradoxically became inhumane. Second, competing ideas of human need have arisen because of the fragmentation of culture since the eighteenth century. Urbanization and industrialization in particular have alienated vast populations, intensifying and accelerating the pace of social change. The cohesion that Bach knew in the first half of the eighteenth century was a fragile structure built in the ruins of the Thirty Years' War. That culture would not survive into the nineteenth century. Even as Germany united politically, it was increasingly divided socially. The artistic problem became how to respond to an alienation that had already occurred and was deepening. The alienation that modernism expressed was not merely an artist's subjective condition, but was a reality at every level of society. An artist had to choose sides. With which part of society would he or she have solidarity? On what would that solidarity be founded?

Attempting to recapture Bach's idea of audience, then, has dangers. For example, a reconciliation of artist and audience today cannot be based merely on recovering Bach's theological presuppositions. The fragmentation of contemporary

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culture continues to accelerate. In a sense, the recovery of Bach's theological-aesthetic mission might only accomplish what modernism has already done: choosing a faction in society and proclaiming the alienation involved in that choice. Artists who want to revive Bach's worldview still have to cross a deepening social and subjective alienation. For Bach to provide a model for a reconciling artist in society, artists will need to see how his practice of composition and musicianship displayed the tools and craft that rebuild solidarity.

Since the 1960s, scholars among evangelical Christians have worked on developing this understanding of artistry. Francis Schaeffer used the visual arts and music to explain the nature of modernity to evangelicals—though his readings of many works remain controversial.[38] Thinkers such as Hans Rookmaaker and Calvin Seerveld further probed aesthetic issues from a theological point of view. Rookmaaker, a jazz musician and scholar, was highly critical of modernism.[39] He wanted, however, to go beyond a critique of culture to stimulate a revival of the arts themselves among Christians. Seerveld sought to articulate a distinctively Christian rationale for the arts that would also be intercultural and not Eurocentric.[40] Nicholas Wolterstorff has written about aesthetics in the tradition of analytical philosophy, describing art as "responsible action" aimed at creating *shalom* in society.[41] William Dyrness has studied the role of the arts in Christian worship traditions,[42] has shown the significance of theology in visual art,[43] and most

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[38]Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007).

[39]H. R. Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970).

[40]Calvin G. Seerveld, *Normative Aesthetics: Sundry Writings and Occasional Lectures*, ed. John H. Kok (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2014).

[41]Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980); Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Works and Worlds of Art*, Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[42]William A. Dyrness, *Senses of the Soul: Art and the Visual in Christian Worship*, Art for Faith's Sake Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008).

[43]William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids:

recently, with Jonathan Anderson, has addressed gaps in modernist scholarship on theological issues—very much in reply to Rookmaaker's criticisms.[44] Among heirs of Bach's theological tradition, there is a vivid awareness of the need to contextualize legacies from the past.

The dangers of using Bach as a model illuminate the ongoing dilemma of the arts after modernism. Modernists said that those who yearned for solidarity were merely treasuring sentimental hopes. Yet, as alienation persists in society—and even deepens— artists still hope that their works will speak effectively as vehicles for self-expression. If one's personal vision is authentic enough, artists hope, his works can build solidarity with audiences through a kind of subjective identification. Just as a conservative theological aesthetic might hope to revive social cohesion from the past, wishing away the reality of the world, so the avant-garde has collapsed in the face of history, sentimentally yearning for an emotional link achieved without intellect and without genuine community.

The definition of *audience* is a necessary, but insufficient, step in proposing a reconciling artistic role in society. Once an artist accepts that viewers and listeners come to a work from a fragmented culture, she can take another step. She can ask what conceptual framework for her craft would enable her to speak across those real divisions and to objectify emotions held in common. This is the step that calls for the definition of *abstraction*.

A key issue in visual art is the modernist antithesis of abstraction against imitation or realism. Dora Vallier expressed this dogmatic view when she wrote of visual art, "Space and time, laid out before us, join in forcing us soon to the conclusion that abstraction lucidly conceived—deduced from the very essence of art, as it has been in the

Baker Academic, 2001).

[44]Jonathan A. Anderson and William A. Dyrness, *Modern Art and the Life of a Culture: The Religious Impulses of Modernism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

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twentieth century—never existed before. The full, deliberate abstract operation is without precedent."[45] The historical claim that abstraction was a new advance in painting, even the end of painting, was a key reason why modernists were dogmatic in arguing for their approaches. As Mondrian wrote, "For let us not forget that we are at a turning point of culture, at the end of everything ancient: the separation between the two is absolute and definite."[46] The techniques of abstraction were driven by a reading of historical necessity.

Modernists made similar historical claims about music, though the issue of abstraction was treated differently. Abstraction was less a removal from realistic content than from accepted forms. Adorno said, "In the process of pursuing its own inner logic, music is transformed more and more from something significant into something obscure—even to itself." This total organization is the only way "music can assert itself against the ubiquity of commercialism." "Under the present circumstances [modern music] is restricted to definitive negation."[47]

Modernist painters and critics often explained their theories of abstraction using music as an analogy.[48] In Mondrian's early article on his move to abstraction—his fictional dialogue with a singer—the singer says that she has the same response to abstract painting that she has to modern music, in which "the recent tone combinations without melody fail to stir me as music with melody does." The painter in the dialogue replies, "But surely an equilibrated composition of pure tone relationships should be able to stir one even more deeply."[49] Kandinsky compared his techniques in painting to

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[45]Dora Vallier, *Abstract Art: A History and Analysis of a Main Current in Twentieth Century Art*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: The Orion Press, 1970), 2.

[46]Piet Mondrian, "Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence," in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 290.

[47]Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, 19–20.

[48]Howard Risatti, "Music and the Development of Abstraction in America: The Decade Surrounding the Armory Show," *Art Journal* 39, no. 1 (October 1, 1979): 8–13.

[49]Mondrian, "Dialogue on the New Plastic," 288.

Schoenberg's music, which "leads us into a new realm where the musical experiences are not acoustic but purely soul inspiring. Here begins the 'music of the future.'"[50] Greenberg wrote of visual artists, "But only when the avant-garde's interest in music led it to consider music as a method of art rather than as a kind of effect did the avant-garde find what it was looking for. It was when it was discovered that the advantage of music lay chiefly in the fact that it was an 'abstract' art, an art of 'pure form.'"[51] Modernists saw both painting and music as passing from one era to another, a passage that called for total artistic devotion to abstraction.

The modernist accounts of abstraction are too tendentious to survive careful examination in terms of art history. While they represent what artists set themselves to achieve in their own time, the accounts carry heavy ideological freight. Hindsight calls for more modest claims.

What does it mean, for example, to describe a piece of music as abstract? The term serves well enough when relating stylistic extremes to each other. Without fear of confusion one could describe *Six Bagatelles* for string quartet (1913) by Anton Webern (1883-1945) as abstract in contrast to *The Lady Is a Tramp* (1937). The string quartet as a genre, however, had a rarified connotation before Webern as an experimental medium for composers almost from its inception. Are the *Bagatelles* abstract "even for a string quartet?" And which of their features would be considered abstract? The term might describe the harmony, the form, the orchestration, the string techniques, even the musical directions, or all them together. Even when everyone would agree that a work is abstract, it's not clear what is being said.

One can find the same ambiguity with *The Lady Is a Tramp*. To an American

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[50]Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, 31.

[51]Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoön," in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 565.

in 1937 who listened to Tommy Dorsey's recording from that year—the same year Richard Rodgers published the song as part of *Babes in Arms*—the music would be as concrete as the nearest night club. But if the Dorsey recording could somehow have been played for an American in 1913, when Tin Pan Alley was the cutting edge and a "big band" was an ensemble that marched in parades, the listener might say the song was gibberish. Popular music develops levels of abstraction too, using the same concept of removal from accepted form.

Adorno and his colleague Max Horkheimer might say that Webern was trying to push the boundaries of art music, while Rodgers exemplified the culture industry's "pseudo individuality" with "the standardized jazz improvisation."[52] But that would be closer to *ad hominem* than analysis. *The Lady Is a Tramp* opens with a highly unusual chord progression: C—C-minor-seventh—D-minor-seventh. Alec Wilder wrote that it's a progression "I've never come across before or since."[53] It would be more accurate to say that Rodgers was pushing boundaries as well.

The challenges of defining musical abstraction are even broader.

Raw sound is literal. Delineating sound into pitch-classes, combining the pitch-classes into melodies and harmonies, and then assembling those structures into larger forms is a series of abstract operations. The history of Western music until Bach could be viewed as the story of one layer of abstraction after another moving further away from raw sound. In what sense is there "abstract music" or "abstract harmony" in a language that is already non-literal? Is abstraction merely related to established forms and conventions?

A way to clarify these issues is to analyze how various levels of abstraction

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[52]Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1999), 154.

[53]Alec Wilder, *American Popular Song: The Great Innovators, 1900-1950*, ed. James T. Maher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 205.

operate within the same work. Bach's "Chaconne," for example, contains many ambiguities. The title and form refer to a dance. Is the "Chaconne" literal, to be played for actual dancers? Further, the form calls for improvisations over an ostinato—a repeated bass line or harmony. Is the ostinato, the repeated harmonic pattern, in Bach's "Chaconne" literal? If not, to what do its variations refer? There is much debate about these questions. More broadly, the "Chaconne" is an expression of Bach's worldview, in which music occupied a prominent place as a reflection of God's glory, even a medium of his presence. How does the "Chaconne" relate to this worldview? Analysis will show that various levels of abstraction have roles in answering these questions, and many others. The modernist account of abstraction, even when contextualized within the modernist understanding of history, has severe problems accounting for the abstractions that operate in Bach's "Chaconne." It has the same problems accounting for abstraction even in modernist visual art.

Artists need, then, an alternative account of abstraction. Abstraction is traditionally defined as removal or generalization from a referent. One can relate abstraction to the artistic process differently from the modernist narrative by conceiving of abstraction as the *start* of a process of individuation, not as the *end* of a process of generalization or removal. An artist or composer starts with such abstract categories as form, archetypical gesture, symbol, color, and harmony and ends with an objectified, unique vision. When the abstractions lose their generality through individuation and are combined in a work of art, the concrete work can be shared with an audience. Abstractions alone cannot be objectified at all, since they remain unformed thoughts. This view is related to the one that William Hazlitt articulated.[54] More recent voices have made similar proposals, including Susanne Langer in philosophy,[55] and Rudolph

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[54]William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930), 2:191.

[55]Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (New York: Scribner, 1953).

Arnheim in psychology.[56]

Such an account of artistic abstraction opens a helpful approach to the relationship between artist and audience. To begin with, the very purpose of individuating abstractions is to share a work with an audience. The artist can challenge the audience without alienating it, even delight the audience without pandering, by how he or she handles abstraction. Bach's "Chaconne" is not merely a piece violinists love to study, but one that audiences want to hear, in spite of the abstractions of an unaccompanied violin giving partial realizations of harmony in the course of fifteen minutes of variations. Furthermore, the artist's integrity can be measured by the goals he or she sets for a work, the imaginative power of the vision, and his or her artistic skill in realizing that vision. The "Chaconne" is more than a showpiece that audiences love, but is a *tour de force* of musical imagination. Importantly, this account of abstraction could explain how so much modern art succeeds with audiences—more than modernist art gets credit for. Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* may have premiered with a riot, but with equal notoriety it was included in Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940). There is a powerful emotional appeal to Kandinsky's paintings that transcends his attitude toward the viewer.

The account also implies an analytical model. One can understand various ways a work succeeds by identifying the abstractions to which it refers, by noting how the abstractions relate to audiences, and by observing how coherently the artist combines individuations.

Bach's "Chaconne" is a useful focus for exploring how this kind of analysis might work. To start at the highest level, Bach's concepts of the created order and spirituality were abstractions that demanded to be expressed concretely, and he saw every work as opportunity to do so. He also saw himself as a kind of scientist, making small instantiations of the cosmos relating to its Creator and to its own diversity. These

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[56]Rudolph Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

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abstractions directly informed Bach's relationship with his audiences. He did not view audiences primarily as receiving his art, but primarily as worshiping the Creator. Audiences were participants. In this sense, he observed no clear distinction between secular and sacred music, reflecting the Reformation's view that all of life is worship, not just what happens in the church building.

At a lower level of abstraction, Bach's choice of the chaconne form arose from his worldview. A chaconne was a secular dance that had originated in the colonies of Spain during the previous century. The form was taken up by French composers and became fashionable first at court and later at middle class balls. German society prized such French refinement as it rebuilt from the Thirty Years' War, and chaconnes became familiar in German courts along with other French dances. By the early 1720s, when Bach composed his "Chaconne," the form was a bit passé. The "Chaconne," then, employed a form of popular, secular entertainment familiar to Bach's audiences. Since his worldview informed him that his audiences were participants, he empowered them to participate.

This form, however, became a vehicle for feats of abstract reference rarely matched in Western music. Bach composed an ostinato for his "Chaconne" that was filled with unrealized harmonic implications—ambiguities buried in his voicing of chords that could be harmonized in strikingly different ways. He composed sixty-four variations that refer back to the ostinato, individuating new solutions to its implications. The variations were composed in pairs, so that variation individuated variation. Even further, they were arranged in a large-scale, three-part form that referred back on itself.

Bach's "Chaconne" is a model for challenging and delighting an audience. He used a familiar form that his audience understood instinctively, not to deconstruct the form or insult the audience, but as a vehicle to objectify his vision of the ostinato. He did so not only in a time of social and economic change, but in the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War as German principalities sought to rebuild a traumatized culture. Perhaps

there is a reason why Bach's music seemed right after the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels. Our culture may not be so different from the early eighteenth century. Bach may have understood the human need for solidarity better than we do.

CHAPTER 2

THE ISSUE OF ARTIST AND AUDIENCE

Thomas Mann, the eminent German novelist, began writing *Doctor Faustus* in 1943, amid the intense violence of World War II.[1] His tale of Adrian Leverkühn, the brilliant composer who makes a pact with the devil, became a lament for the degradation of Germany, the horrors of the war, and the collapse of humanism itself. Mann gave Leverkühn insightful speeches that expound the technical problems faced by Western harmony and their solutions through a fictionalized Schoenbergian theory. (Theodor Adorno, in fact, advised Mann on the novel.) Leverkühn makes his pact with the devil to gain the genius he needs to realize his artistic vision. But the devil dictates the terms: Leverkühn must "renounce all who live" and be utterly alone. "You, fine creature well-created, are promised and betrothed to us. You may not love."[2]

The story of how modernism became alienated from bourgeois audiences might be told from various points of view. The social, economic, and political turmoil of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries offers a rich background from which to portray the alienation artists increasingly felt. Industrialization and urbanization disrupted civil society at every level, from the relationship between laborer and marketplace to the sources and foundations of wealth. Artists displayed this turmoil through every available medium. The overthrow and restoration of monarchies, the intensifying zeal for nationalism, and the projection of new ideologies, of which Marxism was only one,

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[1]Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

[2]Ibid., 264.

provided artists with dramatic conflicts that were at once profound and concrete. Much of the story of modernists and the bourgeoisie has already been told from these points of view.

This chapter tells the story from the perspective of philosophy. Artists were not blown toward modernism unconsciously by gales of social dislocation. They responded to the turmoil from an articulate worldview, out of which they saw certain issues as more important than others. The issue of human freedom in relation to reason, for example, became more significant, while the issue of the nature of beauty receded. The fine arts became battlegrounds on which the implications of philosophical axioms were tested. Artists did not necessarily view themselves as expressing a certain philosophy, much less as creating propaganda, yet they did have a coherent view of what they were doing in relation to audiences. Philosophical accounts of human potential and need shaped their aspirations for their media. Sometimes, as in the cases of Friedrich Schiller as a poet and William Hazlitt as a painter, their philosophical works were informed by their own artistry. The later painters, Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky, advocated their aesthetic goals based on presuppositions articulated by others. In the twentieth century, public intellectuals such as Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Clement Greenberg advanced the philosophical case for modernism as spokesmen for certain artists or movements. Among all of these thinkers, G. W. F. Hegel was the most eminent guide.

The story of the alienation between modernists and audiences tells how a philosophy of human potential paradoxically drove artists to disregard basic human needs. It is the story of genius choosing the purity of its vision over human solidarity.

Friedrich Schiller and Freedom

Schiller's influential work *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* asserted that the fine arts were the means for achieving human freedom, both individually and culturally. Published in 1794, this series of letters reflected Schiller's disillusionment with the

French Revolution, and the failure of successive governments to achieve its ideals. How could the character of a people be ennobled? "We should need, for this end, to seek out some instrument which the State does not afford us, and with it open up well-springs which will keep pure and clear throughout every political corruption." Schiller proposed that external duties could be reconciled with internal feelings when an awareness of beauty raised a person's consciousness. The fine arts educated human beings toward that freedom by liberating them from slavery to sense impressions with a reflective appreciation of beauty.[3]

The problem, Schiller believed, was that the speculative world of the intellect veered too far away from the practical world of experience. Philosophers were following reason toward ideal conceptions of the world while businessmen were building structures to accommodate life as it was actually lived. "Hence the abstract thinker very often has a cold heart, since he analyses the impressions which really affect the soul only as a whole; the man of business has very often a narrow heart, because his imagination, confined within the monotonous circle of his profession, cannot expand to unfamiliar modes of representation."[4] The thinker's cold heart and imagination tighten a spiral of insensibility. His coldness also provokes impatience. "The pure moral impulse is directed at the Absolute; time does not exist for it." Truth, once glimpsed, will not wait for the businessman's practicality to catch up.[5]

In response to this problem, Schiller maintained a philosophical optimism. The problem was one for human rationality, "which Man will be able to solve fully only in the perfection of his being. It is in the truest sense of the term the idea of his humanity, and consequently something infinite to which he can approximate ever nearer in the

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[3]Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 50–51.

[4]Ibid., 42–43.

[5]Ibid., 53.

course of time, without ever reaching it." Human beings, he believed, had the potential to transcend the conflicts of the age and the failures of the State through this continually growing approximation of the ideal. This optimism would become less and less secure, and would eventually be discarded by many modernists. Later dialectical materialists would see Schiller's aesthetic philosophy as another failure of bourgeois culture.

How, according to Schiller, would the fine arts ennoble the practical populace? He developed a moral psychology with three "impulses"—one of sense, another of form, and another of play. The object of the sense impulse was "all material being and all that is immediately present in the senses." The surface and texture of marble spoke to the sense impulse. The form impulse had shape as its object, "all formal qualities of things and all their relations to the intellectual faculties." Carve the marble into a statue of David, and the form impulse has been stimulated. The play impulse is focused on what Schiller called "the living shape," which denotes "all aesthetic qualities of phenomena and—in a word—what we call Beauty in the widest sense of the term." Schiller explained:

> A block of marble, therefore, although it is and remains lifeless, can nevertheless become living shape through the architect and sculptor; a human being, although he lives and has shape, is far from being on that account a living shape. That would require his shape to be life, and his life shape. So long as we only think about his shape, it is lifeless, mere abstraction; so long as we only feel his life, it is shapeless. Mere impression. Only as the form of something lives in our sensation, and its life takes form in our understanding is it living shape, and this will everywhere be the case where we judge it to be beautiful.[6]

When shape and form combine, and an object seems to live, like Michelangelo's *David*, the play impulse is engaged.

Humanity's ability to transcend its senses through reason involved a release into the play impulse, and the fine arts were the tool for uniting life and form through aesthetic appreciation. Schiller proposed that the fine arts offered freedom to those mired in the immediacy of the sense impulse, like the businessman, while at the same time

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[6]Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 76.

engaging the cold-hearted philosopher with the warmth of real life. Political revolutions would never be enough to ennoble human character. Man needed an aesthetic education. "In the midst of the awful realm of powers, and of the sacred realm of laws, the aesthetic creative impulse is building unawares a third joyous realm of play and of appearance, in which it releases mankind from all the shackles of circumstance and frees him from everything that may be called constraint, whether physical or moral."[7]

In Schiller's psychology, reason and freedom are opposed. Freedom must not be constrained by either physical or moral demands. The play impulse sets human beings free because it makes them willing and rational participants in the world. Schiller had an answer for his disillusionment with the French Revolution as a way forward for humanity. The revolution had the right goals, but inadequate means. The path to the fulfillment of human potential ran through the aesthetic.

G. W. F. Hegel and History

Hegel saw where Schiller was headed and he approved. He credited Schiller with grasping "the principles of unity and reconciliation as the truth, and realizing them in art."[8] Adopting the idea of aesthetic education, Hegel thought it might give form to sensuality and passion to make them "rational in themselves, and by the same process reason, freedom, and spirituality may come forward out of their abstraction and . . . be invested with flesh and blood."[9] Hegel would explain how.

Hegel also adopted Schiller's account of freedom and reason: fine art brings the subjective world of experience into voluntary agreement with the objective world of duty. Further yet, Hegel continued Schiller's optimism about aesthetics. Freedom can live

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[7]Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 137.

[8]G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Inwood, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 67.

[9]Ibid., 68.

on through the fine arts.

Taken in this light, Hegel's few comments about the reception of artworks by the audiences of his own time had a deontological character. He said, for example, that Christian European culture

> reveals itself as beyond the stage at which art is the highest mode assumed by man's consciousness of the absolute. . . . We are above the [ancient classical] level at which works of art can be venerated as divine, and actually worshipped; the impression which they make is of a more considerate kind, and the feelings which they stir within us require a higher test and a further confirmation. Thought and reflection have taken their flight above fine art.[10]

For artists to imagine that they could recover their former role in ancient cultures would be a denial of their duty in the present stage. Artists had to meet the new demands of a self-conscious, reasoning epoch. Hegel asserted, "In all these respects art is, and remains for us . . . a thing of the past. Herein it has further lost for us its genuine truth and life, and rather is transferred into our *ideas* than asserts its former necessity, or assumes its former place, in reality [original emphasis]."[11] Art could no longer be the locus of universal meanings. For ultimate reality, Christian European culture was looking to reason.

Hegel's assertions expose the view of audiences that informed not only his theories but also those of later dialectical materialists. Individual taste was simply not part of Hegel's concept. Indeed, it is difficult to find a strong concept of individual personhood in Hegel's aesthetics at all. It is not even clear that Hegel was considering multiple collective audiences. He was primarily thinking of historical stages and of the consciousness they formed. He was, after all, considering the same issue that motivated Schiller: the formation of collective character and the achievement of universal goals in the State. Hegel notes that Schiller's "genuine human being . . . is represented by the

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[10]Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 12.

[11]Ibid., 13.

State, which [Schiller] takes to be the objective, universal, or, so to speak, normal form in which the diversity of particular subjects or persons aims at aggregating and combining itself into a unity."[12] Audiences, for Hegel, were participants in the unfolding self-consciousness of history. The human needs and potential latent in those participants, then, were bound together with the truth of history and could be conceived in no other way.

The artist, therefore, could not merely craft pleasing objects for the senses, but had to endow those objects with an inner meaning that spoke to consciousness. The artist had to advance audiences' consciousness so that they could participate in the collective human experience.

How, then, did Hegel believe art would participate in the modern stage of history? To answer this question, he sought to give a scientific account of art, fully rationalized into his dialectical view of history. Hegel asked why human beings needed to make art in the first place. Art comes from more than the lower impulse of "man's fancies," but "appears to arise from the higher impulse and to satisfy the higher needs, at times, indeed, even the highest, the absolute need of man, being wedded to the religious interests of whole epochs and peoples, and to their most universal intuitions respecting the world."[13] Hegel also asked what art was supposed to convey. "What *is* the true content of art, and with what aim is this content to be presented [original emphasis]?"[14] In particular, what moral purpose does art serve as it develops a people's character?[15]

Man needs to produce art, Hegel said, because he is "a *thinking* consciousness, i.e. that he draws out of himself, and makes explicit *for himself*, that which he is, and,

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[12]Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 68.

[13]Ibid., 35.

[14]Ibid., 51.

[15]Ibid., 58.

generally, whatever is [original emphasis]." Human beings have the unique ability to "reduplicate" themselves, to take what is inside their being and externalize it through action. By modifying external objects, he "finds repeated in them his own characteristics," in this way stripping the external world of "its stubborn foreignness." Hegel compares the human need to make art with the actions of children. "A boy throws stones into the river, and then stands admiring the circles that trace themselves on the water, as an effect in which he attains the sight of something that is his own doing."[16] A work of art is sensuous, then, but nevertheless is primarily aimed at the mind.[17] Hegel specifies that art only addresses what he calls the two theoretical senses, sight and hearing. The other senses are exclusively about physical materials and do not engage the intellect.[18]

As to the content of art and its moral purpose, Hegel said that art takes the human heart through the whole range of emotion and action by a kind deception rather than through actual experience.[19] Art, then, has a unique role in the formation of character. But art has to address the modern moral predicament that "starts from the fixed antithesis of the will in its spiritual universality to its sensuous natural particularity, and consists not in the completed reconciliation of these contrasted sides, but in their conflict with one another, which involves the requirement that the impulses which conflict with duty ought to yield to it." Hegel, like Schiller, saw art as empowering the freedom to yield. Art did not accomplish this by providing instructive content, as if art were only as valuable as it was useful, for "then the work of art would only have value as a useful instrument in the realization of an end having substantive importance outside the sphere

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[16]Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 35–36.

[17]Ibid., 40.

[18]Ibid., 43–44.

[19]Ibid., 51–52.

of art." Rather, art empowers freedom by engaging the dialectic between nature and reason. "Art has the vocation of revealing *the truth* in the form of sensuous artistic shape . . . and, therefore, has its purpose in itself, in this representation and revelation."[20]

Hegel agreed with Schiller that human beings have duties to which their subjective inclinations need to yield. The fine arts mediate the external and the internal by enabling human beings to rise above their senses and follow what is true and beautiful. However, in Hegel, this psychology is part of a larger theory of history. There is an awakening self-consciousness of Spirit in which human beings participate. Their free embrace of truth and beauty is not merely good for individuals, but is a necessary step in the progress of human life as a whole. There is a great deal at stake in the artist's ability to unify truth with sensuous shape.

William Hazlitt and Psychology

Edmund Burke, among other Englishmen, had reacted against the French Revolution for quite different reasons from Schiller. Where Schiller thought that the political tools were inadequate to achieve revolutionary goals, Burke said the goals were wrong in the first place. He predicted that the French Revolution's abstract rationalism would lead to bloodshed and tyranny in its attempt to reshape the real world.[21] For Burke, the cold heart of the theorist was guilty of more than intolerance, as Schiller thought. It was the heart of a fanatical killer. The two disagreed on more than politics. Schiller had pointedly rejected Burke's *On the Sublime and the Beautiful*,[22] dismissing it as driving the intellect out of aesthetics and reducing everything to sense experience.[23] He needed

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[20]Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 61.

[21]Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (repr., New York: Penguin Classics, 1982).

[22]Edmund Burke, *On the Sublime and Beautiful* (Charlottesville, VA: Lincoln-Rembrandt Publishing, n.d.).

[23]Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 77.

no more than a footnote to dispose of Burke's important aesthetic treatise, though it has survived the snub.

Burke and Schiller were characteristic of their respective philosophical cultures. There were large differences of priority and method between the continental and English philosophers. The continental philosophers admired abstract rational structures; the English demanded practical value and real-world observation. Neither culture produced uniformity in thought. Both sides of the channel proliferated skirmishing schools, whether it was John Locke, David Hume, George Berkeley, and Thomas Reid, or Immanuel Kant and Hegel. Nevertheless, the priorities of empiricism and idealism led to divergent argumentation and values.

In the early 1800s, the Englishman William Hazlitt was speculating about human psychology, and doing so with a view toward the implications for artistry. Hazlitt was famous as an essayist, but it is often forgotten now that he was trained in philosophy and painting—training that formed a deeper structure behind his essays. Roy Park describes Hazlitt's philosophical approach as a rejection of abstract systems:

> It was specifically an objection to all closed systems of thought in which the whole of human experience was interpreted in the light of the system's initial premiss, empirical or metaphysical, with scant regard to the individuality, complexity and diversity of 'the truth of things'. It was a rejection of closed systems as such.[24]

Unwilling to be trapped in arguments he saw as self-defeating and unnecessary, Hazlitt said the history of ideas was filled with foolish reactions between schools of thought. "We run from one error into another; and as we were wrong at first, so in altering our course, we have turned about to the opposite extreme. We despised 'experience' altogether before; now we would have nothing but 'experience,' and that of the grossest kind."[25]

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[24]Roy Park, *Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age: Abstraction and Critical Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 35.

[25]William Hazlitt, "Lectures on English Philosophy," in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930), 2:125.

Hazlitt did not see human freedom in terms of Schiller's dichotomy between reason and nature, or in terms of any rigid abstractions. He argued that freedom was simply built into human nature. He started by challenging materialistic premises in his "Prospectus of a History of English Philosophy" (1809). It was a mistake to suppose that internal realities like perception or consciousness had to be proven according to the same terms as physical science.[26] Ideas were not mental copies of sensations. Ideas came from another faculty, the "understanding," which "perceives the relations of things" beyond mere sensations.[27] So internal realities like perception had a non-material basis. Building on that premise, Hazlitt argued that there were motives for human action beyond mere pleasure and pain. One such motive was the "love of truth." One would endure pain and even death for such a motive. Moral obligation was more than a theoretical inference. Moral obligation expressed "the hold or power (be it stronger or weaker) which certain given motives have over the mind, or the ties by which men are bound to their duty." Duty was concrete, not merely abstract. Thus, Hazlitt argued, the human mind is "a real agent." He said, "It is free, in as far as it is not the slave of external impressions, physical impulses, or blind senseless motives."[28]

What did Hazlitt mean by "given motives"? His voluminous literary and artistic criticism filled in the power these motives held. Park notes that Hazlitt "often consciously minimized" the philosophy that lay behind his essays, but his consistency was clear.[29] The human mind was governed by sentiment, which he defined as "the habitual workings of some one powerful feeling, where the heart reposes almost entirely

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[26]William Hazlitt, "Prospectus of a History of English Philosophy," in Howe, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 2:114.

[27]Ibid., 2:116–17.

[28]Ibid., 2:118.

[29]Park, *Hazlitt*, 12; see also Stanley Jones, "Hazlitt's Missing Essay 'on Individuality,'" *The Review of English Studies*, n.s., 28, no. 112 (November 1, 1977): 421.

upon itself, without the violent excitement of opposing duties or untoward

circumstances."[30] Sentiment could be formed, for example, by feelings associated with

the countryside:

> It is because natural objects have been associated with the sports of our childhood, with air and exercise, with our feelings in solitude, when the mind takes the strongest hold of things, and clings with the fondest interest to whatever strikes its attention; with change of place, the pursuit of new scenes, and thoughts of distant friends: it is because they have surrounded us in almost all situations, in joy and in sorrow, in pleasure and in pain; because they have been one chief source and nourishment of our feelings, and a part of our being, that we love them as we do ourselves.[31]

Hazlitt took issue with any school of thought that, in his view, substituted abstract

collective duties for such concrete feelings of attachment, not because there were no

absolute duties, but because the reasoning behind the substitution was reductive.

Utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham, for instance, reduced morality to the findings of

statisticians, insisting that man must "make the good of the Whole . . . the immediate rule

of his conduct; that he is to have no other feeling, thought, or motive, but the public good,

no attachment to individuals, no indulgence of his senses, no scope to his imagination, no

relaxation from care . . . ." He called such teachings "mad and stupid."[32] Similarly,

Hazlitt said that French philosophers had a bias that "circumscribes the truth of things

and the capacities of the human mind within the petty round of vanity, indifference, and

physical sensations, stunts the growth of imagination, effaces the broad light of nature,

and requires us to look at all things through the prism of their petulance and self-

conceit."[33]

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[30]William Hazlitt, "Sismondi's Literature of the South," in Howe, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 16:48.

[31]William Hazlitt, "On the Love of the Country," in Howe, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 4:18.

[32]William Hazlitt, "The Utilitarian Controversy," in Howe, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 20:259.

[33]William Hazlitt, "Madame Pasta and Mademoiselle Mars," in Howe, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 12:328.

Against the "bias to abstraction" that Hazlitt called "the reigning spirit of the age," he positioned the arts as a corrective. The arts emphasized what was concrete, vivid, and individual in life. Characters in a drama, for instance, cannot give speeches on topics, but "must be stamped with the utmost distinctness and vividness in every line." A character "must be a kind of centre of repulsion to the rest; and it is their hostile interests, brought into collision, that must tug at their heart-strings, and call forth every faculty of thought, of speech, and action."[34] A significant goal of Hazlitt's journalism, for which he is most known today, was to popularize the arts—and not only theater. As Maryanne Ward has written, he sought to broaden appreciation of visual art by enticing visitors from the gardens of great houses into the galleries.[35] As the next chapter will show, the painterly eye was one of the keys to his philosophy.

So Hazlitt gave an account of psychology in which freedom was fully operational. He did not seek to reconcile the duties imposed by reason with the imperatives of human nature, as Schiller did. For Hazlitt, it was not the populace that needed an "aesthetic education." It was the philosophers. The arts were needed to sharpen people's appreciation of what they owed concretely in their immediate relationships, not to awaken them to duties invented by abstract theorists. To be sure, Hazlitt's philosophy did not gain a wide influence, much less achieve the dominance of Hegel. But Hazlitt did articulate an approach to human psychology that gave a unique place to the arts. Hazlitt's conclusions about psychology would be echoed from very different points of view more than a century later.

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[34]William Hazlitt, "The Drama: No. IV," in Howe, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 18:305.

[35]Maryanne C. Ward, "Preparing for the National Gallery: The Art Criticism of William Hazlitt and P. G. Patmore," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 23, no. 3 (October 1, 1990): 104–10.

Modernists and Humanity

One can analyze the Hegelian view of human need and potential in these terms. First, human beings have the potential to achieve a rationally ordered society in which collective experience displays the human ideal. Second, in order to reach that potential, human beings need to reconcile their sense experience—what they know from their immediate environments—to the duties of reason, as discovered by the dialectical process of consciousness. Third, human freedom is most genuinely expressed when individuals yield their base interests to the call of reason.

This view of human need and potential took different forms for various modernist artists and theorists, but the outlines are consistent. They saw themselves as engaged in the mission Schiller and Hegel had outlined for the fine arts, that of shaping humanity with artistic vision.

For Mondrian and Kandinsky, for example, painting both revealed and spoke to the deeper order of the universe—an order humanity badly needed to experience. Mondrian grew up in Dutch Calvinism and learned to draw as he made devotional illustrations with his father. Even as he moved further toward abstraction (and after leaving Calvinism for Theosophy), he retained a fascination with such forms as church facades.[36] Mondrian's religious heritage lived on in his fervor for the relationships between forms and the order those relationships expressed. Kandinsky derived his sense of mission in painting from his early experiences of Russian Orthodoxy, in particular his love of the "beautiful corner" in Orthodox homes where icons were displayed.[37]

Kandinsky famously describes the arts in spiritual terms and the role of the artist in society as a sort of prophet. A craven arts community is dominated by museum-goers who consume paintings like pastries and by artists who strive to turn their "aimless,

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[36]Jonathan A. Anderson and William A. Dyrness, *Modern Art and the Life of a Culture: The Religious Impulses of Modernism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 175–79.

[37]Ibid., 197–98.

materialistic art" into wealth.[38] Artists have forsaken their duty to educate the senses

aesthetically. Humanity is not reaching its potential.

> It is then that there unfailingly arises some human being, no different from the rest of humanity but for a secret power of "Vision" within him. He sees and points the way. Sometimes he would prefer to lay aside his power, as it is a heavy cross to bear; but he cannot do so. Though scorned and hated, he never lets go but drags the cartload of protesting humanity after him, ever forcing it forward and upward, over all obstacles in his way.[39]

This artist is at the apex of a triangle, where in his solitude he is considered a fool. Since

the masses of humanity below him in the triangle "have never solved any problem

independently, but have always been dragged in the cart of humanity by self-sacrificing

fellowmen, who stand high above them, they know nought of this progress which they

always have observed from afar."[40] This is Kandinsky's account of the avant-garde,

which leads the revival of aesthetic education for the masses. The fine arts change the

character of the populace. But these masses of individuals are not quite the free agents

Schiller envisioned. They're dragged in a cart.

Mondrian saw his move to abstraction as part of a historical process, "a turning

point of culture," but toward goals that were equally spiritual in nature. He saw the

process as dictated by logic, which demands that art must "be the direct expression of the

universal in us which is the exact appearance of the universal outside us." Logic was

actually abolishing the subjective. "The tragic in life leads to artistic creation: art,

because it is abstract and in opposition to the natural concrete, can anticipate the gradual

disappearance of the tragic. The more the tragic diminishes, the more art gains in

purity."[41] Mondrian's assumption of a dialectical evolution is clear in such statements.

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[38]Wassily Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, ed. Hilla Rebay (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1946), 12–13.

[39]Ibid., 15–16.

[40]Ibid., 21.

[41]Piet Mondrian, "Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence," in *Art in Theory, 1900 - 2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 289.

But, again, there is not much room for freedom. Mondrian is a missionary for a new kind of subjective life, one that history demands.

The Hegelian account of human need and potential is clearest, however, among theorists. As Schiller responded to the crisis of the French Revolution in the 1790s, so Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Walter Benjamin responded to the crisis of Adolf Hitler's Germany in the 1930s and 40s. From the nation that should have been the powerhouse of aesthetic education erupted violence and irrationality on a scale that dwarfed the French Revolution's viciousness. German Jewish intellectuals on the left had to explain why the character of a people steeped in fine art and literature had become so susceptible to Hitler's ideology. Schillerian optimism was untenable. These theorists employed the post-Hegelian narrative of dialectical materialism.

Adorno and Horkheimer wrote *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in exile from Germany, when the outcome of World War II was still in doubt. In their account of cultural development, individual freedom had been destroyed by capitalism—the modern expression of rationality. Those who are employed in the system are slaves to their standard of living. The unemployed are "mere objects of the administered life … against which they believe there is nothing they can do. . . . Each individual is unable to penetrate the forest of cliques and institutions which, from the highest levels of command to the last professional rackets, ensure the boundless persistence of status."[42]

In such a context, Adorno and Horkheimer pronounce the moral authority of Enlightenment rationality dead. "The moral teachings of the Enlightenment bear witness to a hopeless attempt to replace enfeebled religion with some reason for persisting in society when interest is absent." Its doctrines are "propagandist and sentimental"—even Kant's attempts to ground ethics in fact:

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[42]Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1999), 38.

It is the conventional attempt of bourgeois thought to ground respect, without which civilization cannot exist, upon something other than material interest and force; it is more sublime and paradoxical than, yet as ephemeral as, any previous attempt. The citizen who would forego profit only on the Kantian motive of respect for the mere form of law would not be enlightened, but superstitious—a fool.[43]

Thus, the entire Schillerian hope for aesthetic education is lost, while the Hegelian grind of history remains.

What, then, becomes of art? Adorno and Horkheimer assemble a dialectical puzzle to characterize the "culture industry" of capitalism as "mass deception." "Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part. Even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system."[44] The industry has a "technical and personnel apparatus which, down to its last cog, itself forms part of the economic mechanism of selection."[45] The very technological perfection of film dominates the audience's imagination and allows them no response.[46] In all these ways, Adorno and Horkheimer charge, the culture industry has destroyed the ability of the intellect to affect culture.

Today aesthetic barbarity completes what has threatened the creations of the spirit since they were gathered together as culture and neutralized. To speak of culture was always contrary to culture. Culture as a common denominator already contains in embryo that schematization and process of cataloging and classification which bring culture within the sphere of administration. And it is precisely the industrialized, the consequent, subsumption which entirely accords with this notion of culture. By subordinating in the same way and to the same end all areas of intellectual creation, by occupying men's senses from the time they leave the factory in the evening to the time they clock in again the next morning with matter that bears the impress of the labor process they themselves have to sustain throughout the day, this subsumption mockingly satisfies the concept of a unified culture which the philosophers of personality contrasted with mass culture.[47]

Adorno and Horkheimer were not attacking artistic output that they found banal. They

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[43] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, 85.

[44] Ibid., 120.

[45] Ibid., 122.

[46] Ibid., 126.

[47] Ibid., 131.

were attacking capitalism as the historical rationality that had enslaved the individual.

Germany, then, had been corrupted by capitalism. All sectors of society had become complicit in the deception of enlightenment. The fascist domination of Germany was inevitable. While Adorno articulated a clear role for art in response to this crisis, the bourgeois dream of human freedom was over, and any honest art would reveal that truth without pity.

While present in Benjamin's writings, the Hegelian account of human need and potential is less rigorously applied, just as Benjamin was a less formal Marxist than his friend Adorno. The dialectic is not so much an analytical method as a set of assumptions. Still, Benjamin made his stance toward the audiences of artworks clear:

> In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful. Not only is any reference to a certain public or its representatives misleading, but even the concept of an "ideal" receiver is detrimental in the theoretical consideration of art, since all it posits is the existence and nature of man as such. Art, in the same way, posits man's physical and spiritual existence, but in none of its works is it concerned with his response. No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener.[48]

His statement's tone is typically modernist both in its doctrinaire—one is tempted to say theological—pronouncements ("no poem . . . no picture . . . no symphony"), and in its low view of the people who receive art ("consideration" of whom "never proves fruitful"). These individual people now have no freedom, and they are unworthy of more than a mention. Genuine art follows a higher path.

The paragraph quoted above opened Benjamin's "Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*," in which he confronted the question of whether translation can convey anything of an original work at all. It might have appeared that the recipients of a poem needed to have a translation in order to read it, but Benjamin excluded them from consideration. It transpired that translation, according to

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[48]Walter Benjamin, "An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 69.

Benjamin, created a higher, purer language that benefitted humanity as a whole. "For any translation of a work originating in a specific stage of linguistic history represents, in regard to a specific aspect of its content, translation into all other languages."[49] So concerned was Benjamin with the rarified air of this abstract language that any individuals who might actually have read a specific translation are entirely eclipsed.

This was not the only place Benjamin expressed a dim view of those who receive artworks. "The crowd—no subject was more entitled to the attention of nineteenth-century writers," he said. "It . . . had acquired facility in reading. It became a customer; it wished to find itself portrayed in the contemporary novel, as the patrons did in the paintings of the Middle Ages."[50] For Benjamin, the fact of the mass audience's existence was enough to prove that a writer who portrayed the lives of ordinary people was merely pleasing his patrons. Elsewhere, Benjamin argued that when artworks are designed for reproducibility "the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics."[51] Ritual kept artworks for a few, while reproducibility brought works to the masses. This observation was just a stepping stone to impeaching such art as mere propaganda. Benjamin used the same move to impugn the film actor's aura as inauthentic: "The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality,' the phony spell of a commodity."[52] Again, the size of the mass audience and the technology of reproducibility were the only premises that Benjamin had to support these sweeping statements about the artistic merit of film. He made the same move yet again in the essay: "The simultaneous contemplation of paintings by a large

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[49]Benjamin, "An Introduction," 75.

[50]Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in Zohn, *Illuminations*, 166.

[51]Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Zohn, *Illuminations*, 224.

[52]Ibid., 231.

public, such as developed in the nineteenth century, is an early symptom of the crisis of painting, a crisis which was by no means occasioned exclusively by photography but rather in a relatively independent manner by the appeal of art works to the masses."[53] The fact that paintings appealed to large audiences was enough for Benjamin to declare the beginning of a crisis.

How could such a sophisticated observer make so many judgments about mass audiences on the basis of no evidence, no analysis of actual artworks, and nothing even resembling an attempt to argue the case? Benjamin could do it—and apparently get away with it—because he wrote from so far within a dialectical narrative that the intellectual system, powered by his considerable rhetorical fluency, seemed to justify itself. Is there a mass audience, or not? Is art being reproduced for the masses, or not? Is history moving, or not? Well, there you are. A film actor is a nothing more than a commodity. Benjamin knew a thing or two about "spells."

The decline of the Hegelian dialectic from a nuanced philosophical system to a Byzantine puzzle in Adorno and to mere attitudes in Benjamin is evident in the criticism of Greenberg as well. His famous essay from 1939, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch,"[54] made convenient use of dialectics to privilege the artists he favored, the avant-garde, and to disparage the mass audience. Avant-garde culture was made possible by a "superior consciousness of history," which Greenberg said had shown bourgeois society to be but one stage in social development. This "advanced intellectual conscience" influenced artists "even if unconsciously for the most part."[55] The artistic duty to follow such an "advanced conscience" is not argued but asserted on the basis of presumed superiority of intellectual analysis.

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[53]Benjamin, "Work of Art," 234.

[54]Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 539–49.

[55]Ibid., 540.

Greenberg described the industrial classes that had gathered in cities in terms similar to Benjamin. The ability to read had been associated with cultural distinction, but with the advent of universal literacy "it was no longer the exclusive concomitant of refined tastes." The proletariat learned "to read and write primarily for the sake of efficiency" rather than for the appreciation of "the traditional culture of the city."

> Losing, nevertheless, their taste for the folk culture whose background was the countryside, and discovering a new capacity for boredom at the same time, the new urban masses set up a pressure on society to provide them with a kind of culture fit for their own consumption. To fill the demand of the new market, a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide.

Kitsch was produced industrially from "the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture," and it is profitable because of the insensibility of the masses. "Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations."[56]

Even if one passes by the reductive account of universal literacy, and assumes that extended jargon unnourished by argument or example is acceptable enough support for bald assertions, one still struggles to distinguish between "mechanical" features in kitsch and mannerisms in "genuine culture." One struggles to delineate form from "formula." Greenberg seems to feel no obligation to help readers with such insignificant details, since the very existence of a mass audience is all the justification he needs for declaring kitsch to be "ersatz culture."

Such was the dominant school of art theory, practice, and criticism in the first half of the twentieth century. Its account of audience reception was Hegelian in the sense that it understood audiences as participants in the movement of history. But modernists abandoned the optimism in which Hegel had constructed his system. There was no point in advancing aesthetic education because there was no freedom to which audiences could

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[56]Greenberg, "Avant-Garde," 543.

aspire. In fact, all artistic evocations of freedom were not merely poor but, in the Hegelian sense, immoral. For modernists, any artist who recalled bourgeois visions of individual agency and virtue was a liar. The role of art was to embody the truth, which was the enslavement of the masses by capitalism. Genuine artists raised the consciousness of the masses to that reality. To accomplish such a feat, art was required to step entirely outside the laws of capitalism and present a clear antithesis.

Susanne Langer and Symbols

At the same time that Adorno and Horkheimer were writing *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, American philosopher Susanne Langer was coming to very different conclusions from dialectical materialists about human needs and potential. A student of A. N. Whitehead (1861-1947), she did not see the progress of knowledge in terms of an abstract Spirit coming to consciousness, but in terms of what she called "generative questions" that shaped systems of thought in each era. She applied Whitehead's process philosophy to issues on which twentieth century thought had run aground. In the modern era, questions focused on what Whitehead called "the bifurcation of nature," that is, the division between subject and object, of inner experience and outer experience. Langer wrote that the generative questions of the modern era were "framed in these terms: What is actually given to the mind? What guarantees the truth of sense-data? What lies behind the observable order of phenomena? What is the relation of the mind to the brain? How can we know other selves? All these are familiar problems of today."[57] She believed that philosophy had stopped making progress on these issues, but was merely incorporating thought "into more and more variegated 'isms.'" She said, "If we would have new knowledge, we must get us a whole world of new questions."[58] Human beings, she said,

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[57]Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study of the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 12.

[58]Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 13.

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needed more than what the scientific method at that point could verify. She confessed this as a heresy: "I believe there is a primary need in man, which other creatures probably do not have, and which actuates all his apparently unzoological aims, his wistful fancies, his consciousness of value, his utterly impractical enthusiasms, and his awareness of a 'Beyond' filled with holiness."[59]

Whitehead, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, according to Langer, saw two language systems of logic that expressed the same natural facts, one being the system of physical terms, and the other being the system of psychical terms—the language of the outer experience and that of the inner. She proposed that the symbolic language of feeling needed to be accounted for in the vocabulary of natural science.[60]

Langer believed that, before such an accounting could be given, science needed to admit its current limitations, especially its inability to explain key human phenomena. The use of signs—physical and biological indicators of needs and states of affairs—fits well within a scientific framework of verification. Signs direct an animal's attention to features of its immediate environment. But some signs stand for realities that are not directly connected to physical drives and are not even present in the immediate environment. "They serve, rather, to let us develop a characteristic attitude toward objects *in absentia*, which is called 'thinking of' or 'referring to' what is not there. 'Signs' used in this capacity are not *symptoms* of things, but *symbols*."[61] Langer went on, "If our basic needs were really just those of lower creatures much refined, we should have evolved a more realistic language than in fact we have." Instead, she said, human beings have developed rituals and magic, which are completely dependent on the language of

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[59]Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 40.

[60]Susanne K. Langer, *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, ed. Gary Van Den Heuvel, abridged ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 4–5.

[61]Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 29–31.

symbolism.[62] Further, human beings are devoted to art. The universal human phenomenon of dreaming, so full of symbols, occurs during sleep, when the activity of the mind "serves no practical purpose."[63] Langer said that philosophy needed to direct its analytical power to uncovering the logic of symbolism.

> Symbolization is pre-rationative, but not pre-rational. It is the starting point of all intellection in the human sense, and is more general than thinking, fancying, or taking action. For the brain is not merely a great transmitter, a super-switchboard; it is better likened to a great transformer. The current of experience that passes through it undergoes a change of character, not through the agency of the sense by which the perception entered, but by virtue of a primary use which is made of it immediately: it is sucked into the stream of symbols which constitutes a human mind.[64]

The mind is a transformer: the input of sense experience emerges from the mind as symbolism. Interestingly, this is precisely the same distinction between sensation and understanding that Hazlitt had made more than a century before, but here articulated from a materialistic point of view.

Human beings, according to Langer, have a basic need for symbols to orient them in the world. From the rituals that permeated every aspect of daily life in primitive cultures to the routine of prayer that governed each day in Christian Europe, there is an intellectual requirement on display in history. She noted the impact that the loss of symbols had had on community:

> In modern society such exercises are all but lost. Every person finds his Holy of Holies where he may: in Scientific Truth, Evolution, the State, Democracy, Kultur, or some metaphysical word like "the All" or "the Spiritual." Human life in our age is so changed and diversified that people cannot share a few, historic, "charged" symbols that have about the same wealth of meaning for everybody. This loss of old universal symbols endangers our safe unconscious orientation.[65]

Ultimately, she connected the loss of symbolism to the loss of freedom. "A mind that is

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[62]Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 36.

[63]Ibid., 37.

[64]Ibid., 42.

[65]Ibid., 287–88.

oriented, no matter by what conscious or unconscious symbols, in material and social realities, can function freely and confidently even under great pressure of circumstance and in the face of hard problems." There is a "shuttling to and fro" between signs and symbols, in which reality is "intrinsically 'meaningful.'"[66] In a culture devoid of symbols—or that lacks respect for them—there is an encroaching totalitarianism:

> Men fight passionately against being forced to do lip-service, because the enactment of a rite is always, in some measure, assent to its meaning; so that the very expression of an alien mythology, incompatible with one's own vision of "fact" or "truth," works to the corruption of that vision. It is a breach of personality. To be obliged to confess, teach, or acclaim falsehood is always felt as an insult exceeding even ridicule and abuse. Common insult is a blow at one's ego; but constraint of conscience strikes at one's ego and super-ego, one's whole world, humanity, and purpose. It takes a strong mind to keep its orientation without overt symbols, acts, assertions, and social corroborations; to maintain it in the face of the confounding pattern of enacted heresy is more than average mentality can do.[67]

Where Schiller and Hegel saw a need for human beings to achieve the transcendence of reason over mere sensation, Langer, like Hazlitt, saw the transcendence as built into the human intellect—though, unlike Hazlitt, Langer was coming from materialistic presuppositions. Where dialectical materialists saw human beings under the compulsion of history, forced to protest the loss of their freedom, Langer saw freedom under strain as free nevertheless. The threat to freedom was the philosophical refusal to account for knowledge that did not conform to positivist demands—a denial that conscience was basic to human need and potential. Langer was able, therefore, to approach the subject of art without dialectical shackles. She was able to acknowledge the low condition of mass culture at mid-century:

> A vague longing for the old tribal unity makes nationalism look like salvation, and arouses the most fantastic bursts of chauvinism and self-righteousness; the wildest anthropological and historical legends; the deprecation and distortion of learning; and in place of orthodox sermons, that systematic purveying of loose, half-baked ideas which our generation knows as "propaganda."[68]

[66]Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 289.

[67]Ibid., 291.

[68]Ibid., 292.

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But Langer was also able to warn traditional philosophy that the "Witches' Sabbath" of disordered symbols was not inhuman. "What they are thus wildly and mistakenly trying to do is human, intellectual, and necessary." Philosophy needed to understand the logic of symbols.[69]

Why would thinkers as different as Langer and Hazlitt, separated by nearly a century and a half, and approaching philosophy from different worldviews come to such similar positions? They agreed that human cognition was not enslaved to sense experience, but transformed experience into "ideas" (for Hazlitt) and "symbols" (for Langer). They also agreed that human beings were free, and that freedom was built into human nature. These points of agreement seem quite specific, especially in light of the fact that they were both consciously declining to go along with the dominant trends in their respective eras. Chapter 4 will show that there are even more points of agreement.

J. S. Bach and History

The modernist concept of audience was shaped by presuppositions about human need and potential. Human potential was bound up in collective experience—the character of peoples. Through the expression of rationality in capitalism, human beings had lost freedom. The bourgeois dream of an aesthetic education that would reconcile individual life to rational duty was over. Now, the audience needed to become conscious of the lies of modern life. They needed the liberating truth, which was the destruction of solidarity.

J. S. Bach died before this concept was formulated. Such a routine chronological note is important for our understanding of how Bach related to his listeners. His concepts of human need and potential were sophisticated, systematic, and articulate, but they were not informed by post-Enlightenment philosophers. Chapter 4

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[69]Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 292, 294.

will show some of the specific ways his concept of audience was shaped by the theology of the Reformation. For now, this note allows us to be clear about what conceptions Bach did not have about audiences.

When Bach performed a chorale prelude for worshippers at Blasius Church in Mühlhausen, he did not think of them as needing an aesthetic education. That is, he did not conceive of their psychology in terms of a sense impulse and a form impulse, which received mediation from a play impulse. In Bach's mind, his chorale prelude had no role in helping them apprehend Beauty so that their individuality could be reconciled to their rational duties. He certainly saw his prelude in relation to the worshippers' needs and potential, but not in Schillerian categories.

With fingers on harpsichord keys in the court at Cöthen, performing an allemande for Prince Leopold, Bach had no awareness of the national problem behind Schiller's concept of aesthetic education. That is to say, he did not think of the State as the decisive tool for meeting the revolutionary goals of the Enlightenment, and he did not grapple with why such a revolution would fail to meet its goals. Thus, he did not view an allemande as a means to shape the character of the principality of Cöthen in the Schillerian sense. While Bach certainly did have a view of how an allemande helped meet the aspirations of his people, and while he saw those aspirations in the context of violence and national failure, what he was actually accomplishing was entirely too conservative for the likes of Schiller.

When Bach led his ensemble in Leipzig for an audience of bourgeois concert-goers, he did not see them in Hegelian terms. They were not, in his eyes, participants in the growing consciousness of Spirit. His orchestral suite was not a means of bringing them to consciousness of their place in history. In fact, Bach would not have acknowledged that he was serving history at all. The artistic duty to participate in the Hegelian dialectic—beyond being a future intellectual development of which Bach was unaware—was a duty that Bach would have consciously and articulately repudiated. To

be sure, Bach viewed even his secular audiences in teleological terms. But his teleology was animated by a Deity far more personal than the one Hegel acknowledged. Bach incorporated these presuppositions into his work, and they provided him with rationales for bringing listeners into his music.

Accompanying a singer during a recitative from one of his cantatas at St. Thomas Church, Bach included the instrumentalists, vocalists, assembled worshippers, and the pastor in an action that, he believed, addressed human freedom. However, Bach's conception of freedom, and of the threats to it, was the very conception against which Enlightenment rationalism deployed its arguments: the deductive precepts of revealed religion, with its historical claims, authoritative Scripture, and embarrassing miracles. The cantata recitative he accompanied would have been a musical rendering of a passage from the Bible, narrating some aspect of the Christian gospel, the word of God that spoke directly to the human conscience. When received by faith, that gospel, Bach believed, freed human beings from sin.

In one sense, a series of chronological observations to specify that Bach did not believe Schillerian and Hegelian philosophy is regrettable. But such a basic note is necessary because some modernists cited Bach's work as a precedent for their theories without any consideration of Bach's theories. Adorno, among others, seemed to assimilate everything into the explanatory power of his narratives. He was quite capable of explaining Bach's artistry without pedestrian justifications such as contextualization— as if Adorno understood what Bach was doing better than Bach did.

For example, here is Adorno's proclamation about Schoenberg's use of counterpoint: "Schoenberg was once viewed as a synthesis of Brahms and Wagner. In the later works of Schoenberg and Webern still higher goals are sought. The alchemy of these works would appear to unite the most fundamental impulses of Bach and

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Beethoven."[70] If one takes this as a statement that Bach created works in which harmony and line were unified in counterpoint, Adorno's statement is fair enough. But Adorno was not discussing purely technical points of musical composition. He was in the midst of arguing that Schoenberg used twelve-tone counterpoint to escape the "regressive" counterpoint with which Romanticism decorated otherwise homophonic compositions, being unfaithful to their dialectical duty.[71] In other words, Bach's counterpoint was assimilated into Adorno's dialectic as if Bach's documented views of his art were superseded by Adorno's higher consciousness. Adorno gives no credit at all to the beliefs that actually animated Bach's use of counterpoint. Indeed, when Adorno and Horkheimer describe bourgeois faith, specifying Luther, they see it as restricting the kind of knowledge that art brings to consciousness.

> Since [faith] is always set upon the restriction of knowledge, it is itself restricted. The attempt of Protestant faith to find, as in prehistory, the transcendental principle of truth (without which belief cannot exist) directly in the word itself, and to reinvest this with symbolic power, has been paid for with obedience to the word, and not to the sacred.[72]

Such faith, as Adorno saw it, "degenerates into a swindle."[73] If the faith that motivated Bach was a swindle, what did that make his counterpoint?

Claims on the legacy of Bach such as Adorno's amount to an ideological seizure of intellectual property. Bach's most "fundamental impulses" were not musical, but theological. Bach's relationship to his audiences cannot be understood in modernist categories.

In part, Adorno's claim about Bach arose from his larger theory that music contains social meanings within itself. Julian Johnson has analyzed the difficulty of

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[70]Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster, Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers (New York: Continuum, 2003), 54.

[71]Ibid., 52–54.

[72]Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, 19–20.

[73]Ibid., 20.

reconciling pure musical analysis with contextual and social inquiry. He cites Jean-Jacques Nattiez's quip that "Adorno read social structures from musical ones in the way an astrologer reads one's future in coffee grounds."[74] Setting aside the question of whether musical works embody social meanings, it is important to ask how Bach viewed the audiences for whom he composed and performed. In this respect, Johnson's conclusion is helpful:

> My point here is that the social and cultural dimension of the music is not read *off* the notes, like Nattiez's astrologer reading coffee grounds, but is nevertheless given *through* the musical material. Adorno's challenge is that our inability to read the music as eloquent in this way is not to do with the music, but with the degree to which our understanding of it has been insulated against the way in which music responds to the world in and against which it is made.[75]

By ignoring Bach's worldview, Adorno himself seems to have been insulated against Bach's eloquence. Adorno, like other modernists, proclaimed what other stages of history meant as a totalizing assertion, not as a matter of inquiry.

This criticism is not founded merely on the implications of some of Adorno's musical analyses of Bach. Adorno stated as a principle that the present understanding of past composers should eclipse their understanding of their own work. "Only history itself, real history with all its suffering and all its contradiction, constitutes the truth of music. This, however, means nothing else than that one cannot acquire a philosophical knowledge of music by constructing its ontological origin, but only from the standpoint of the present." Adorno said that what is known of Beethoven and Bach is determined in detail "by the state that compositional processes have reached today." He restated the principle in evolutionary terms: "It is only from the vantage point of the most advanced production that light is shed on the entire species."[76]

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[74]Julian Johnson, "The Nature of Abstraction: Analysis and the Webern Myth," *Music Analysis* 17, no. 3 (October 1, 1998): 268.

[75]Ibid., 278.

[76]Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Contemporary Relationship of Philosophy and Music," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 147–48.

This is why Adorno felt able to make broad pronouncements about Bach's music, and why he could slip such assertions as casual asides into paragraphs about other topics. For example, in the middle of another passage extolling Schoenberg's counterpoint, declaring that its unity made the question of harmonic progression "superfluous," Adorno adds, "as it was, by the way, in the greatest polyphonic instrumental works of Bach's late period."[77] Whatever the observation's merit, it goes too far: neither Bach nor Schoenberg made questions of harmonic progression "superfluous." Again, while discussing music that seems put together like a "jigsaw puzzle," Adorno says that such works lack a quality of "Becoming." Then he adds,

> And incidentally, this may also be said to a certain extent to apply to Bach, producing at times in his case—due to the absence of the aspect of Becoming—that impression of mechanicalness which can be dispelled only by an ideological effort [of interpretation] which actually glorifies the apparent mechanicalness as a special kind of logicality.[78]

Adorno asserts the "absence of the aspect of Becoming" in Bach "incidentally," without any awareness that his remark might need some expansion. Yet again, while discussing the unity of the whole with particulars in musical works, Adorno claims that Bach's forms "might have seemed to be brought forth from within the free subject"—from particular motifs. Adorno says that after Viennese classicism, only modern music brought particular and whole together again.[79] Another portentous announcement declaimed without the necessary qualifications, specifics, or evidence. In context, these off-handed references to Bach (and the crowd of others in Adorno's writings) seem readily acceptable—if the reader never questions Adorno's assumptions. Taken on their own as assertions, however, they are unsupported and sometimes barely intelligible. This habit is the more unfortunate because Adorno was capable of penetrating and articulate musical

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[77]Adorno, "Philosophy and Music," 152.

[78]Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Problem of Musical Analysis (1969)," in Leppert, *Essays on Music*, 170–71.

[79]Theodor W. Adorno, "Little Heresy (1965)," in Leppert, *Essays on Music*, 320.

insights, as when he compared the masses of Bach and Beethoven.[80] There might have been much to gain from the valuable kernels in Adorno's asides if he had been less focused on ideological domination.

The next chapter will examine a method in Adorno's rhetoric that served his ideological strategy. But here it is enough to note that Adorno did not feel bound by anything that Bach might have thought about his own music. The truth of history was all that mattered about Bach—truth that, as the dialectic would have it, Adorno happened to be formulating.

Since Adorno claimed that the truth about Bach could only be revealed by the latest advances in art, one wonders how well Adorno understood the methods and ideas of Schoenberg, his contemporary hero. Schoenberg answered this question himself.

Adorno advised Thomas Mann about the musical aspects of *Doctor Faustus*, in which Mann created Adrian Leverkühn as a kind of fictional Schoenberg. Mann publicly credited Adorno with "exceptional technical knowledge and intellectual attainments,"[81] and portrayed him as an expert on music and philosophy.[82] But the gracious public narrative covered Mann's private disenchantment and annoyance at Adorno's pomposity. Mann soured on the relationship because of Adorno's turgid writing, his attempts to gain publication through Mann's advocacy, his "confused intellectual poetry" in *Minima Moralia*, his "bad" piano playing, and especially his indiscretion in bragging to third parties about his contributions to the novel.[83] Mann seems to have regarded Adorno as an intellectual opportunist.

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[80]Theodor W. Adorno, "Alienated Masterpiece: The 'Missa Solemnis' (1959)," in Leppert, *Essays on Music*, 574–575.

[81]Thomas Mann, *The Story of a Novel: The Genesis of Doctor Faustus*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), 42.

[82]Ibid., 44–45.

[83]Lorenz Jager, *Adorno: A Political Biography*, trans. Stewart Spencer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 131–32.

Schoenberg's own opinion of Adorno went from jaded to bitter, partly because of Adorno's involvement with Mann. As early as 1929, Schoenberg was put off by Adorno's ponderous writing style. Calling Adorno by his other family name "Wiesengrund," Schoenberg complained that he was one of those writers who makes the reader retrace the arguments "in order to find out what he means, and then one fails to see why he does not say it straight away, since it's so simple."[84] By 1950, after Adorno's *Philosophy of Modern Music* was published, Schoenberg was complaining that he "could never really stand him."[85] He blamed Adorno for Mann's portrayal of the syphilitic Leverkühn dying insane, "feeling that he [Schoenberg] had been misunderstood, robbed of his intellectual property and even denounced as sick in the novel."[86] Ultimately, Schoenberg wrote that

> Thomas Mann's Adrian Leverkühn does not know the essentials of composing with twelve tones. All he knows has been told him by Mr. Adorno, who knows only the little I was able to tell my pupils. The real fact will probably remain secret science until there is one who inherits it by virtue of an unsolicited gift.[87]

Adorno's hero didn't think much of his theories about the state of the art of composition.

The modernist understanding of human need and potential was profoundly different from Bach's understanding. Modernists like Adorno, Benjamin, and Greenberg viewed artists as prophets exhorting a profane audience. They did not drift unconsciously toward that view, but made philosophical choices entailing new artistic duties that Bach would not have recognized. A rediscovery of Bach's understanding of his audiences not only reveals how he challenged them, but deflates an arrogance that Adorno typified, the certitude that all artists at all times would have been modernists too, if only they had

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[84]Arnold Schoenberg, "Glosses on the Theories of Others (1929)," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (New York: St. Martins Press, 1975), 315.

[85]Jager, *Adorno*, 132.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Arnold Schoenberg, "The Blessing of the Dressing (1948)," in Stein, *Style and Idea*, 386.

sufficiently evolved. The fictional Leverkühn in his Faustian bargain was an apt picture of the archetypical modernist. He cut a deal with the spirit of abstraction. He could accomplish feats of genius that would satisfy his vision of pure humanism only if he renounced every human attachment and sacrificed solidarity. "You may not love."

CHAPTER 3

COMPETING ACCOUNTS OF ABSTRACTION

If one consults a few theorists, a triangle can become unexpectedly complicated. To a small child—let's call her Emily—a triangle is a specific, concrete thing that has a name. Show her a picture of one and she will say the name immediately. A philosopher watching Emily, however, might inquire what sort of thing a triangle is, what sort of thing a name is, and what sort of action it is to apply the single name *triangle* to two shapes that are obviously different. A geometry teacher might lean forward and explain that triangles can be measured, and missing data discovered through various formulae. An artist might add that Wassily Kandinsky developed ideas and practices for the use of shapes like triangles in painting. These theoretical complications all involve abstractions of one kind or another. The abstractions, though, don't interest Emily, who would rather show the adults her own triangle drawings.

Once Emily is done drawing, a similar dynamic might happen with a song in three parts. A violin teacher using the famous Suzuki method could teach Emily the "apple" section of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," then the "banana" section, and finally tell her to repeat the "apple" section. An ethnomusicologist might provide several examples of A-B-A form found in different cultures. A music theory specialist might discuss the importance of modulations that sometimes occur in the B-section. A music historian might then play Mahler's "Adagietto" from the *Fifth Symphony*, analyzing how Mahler sustained one A-B-A melody for ten minutes. Then the philosopher, looking up from a triangle drawing, might ask what sort of a thing music is. Again, these contributions involve abstractions that would not interest Emily, for whom the "apple" section is a specific set of sounds, as concrete to her as an apple.

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The issue of abstraction in art is both profound and tangled. Abstraction operates in the background of a work, and may be most powerful when someone is not conscious of it. Emily can feel the satisfaction of the "apple" section's return without realizing anything about musical form. Similarly, someone hearing Mahler's "Adagietto" for the first time is probably not aware of its form, yet feels the tug of recognition at the main theme's recapitulation. While that virgin hearing can never be repeated, increasing awareness of abstraction can deepen one's appreciation for the piece. A fifth hearing of the "Adagietto" can give moments of wonder at the movement's intricacy. In the same way, Emily might play the returning "apple" section differently when she is aware of the form. But the power of abstraction is fragile. It only lasts as long as the attention of the viewer or listener, who may after all doze off during the "Adagietto."

The thinkers surveyed in Chapter 2 give competing accounts of the importance and role of abstraction in artworks. These accounts flow from their different views of human potential and need. Friedrich Schiller and G. W. F. Hegel warned against too much abstraction in art, only to demand more abstraction as a way of advancing consciousness. For later ideologues, the Hegelian complexities were an opportunity. Dialectical materialists like Theodor Adorno and Clement Greenberg would reinterpret Hegel for artists, making abstraction a tool for human progress. Meanwhile, in the strangely overlapping thought of William Hazlitt and Susanne Langer, abstraction ceased to be regarded as the acme of intelligence and became a commonplace, a starting-point for thought, with real sophistication being shown in particularities.

Definition of Abstraction

A preliminary challenge is to compile a definition of *abstraction* that can cover—and sometimes correct—usage of the term. Usage over more than two centuries was bound to change and even become muddled.

The core idea of abstraction is removal or generalization.[1] Hayakawa's famous image of an "abstraction ladder" starts with a concrete singularity—say, your pet Lucius—and places that singularity in progressively broader categories: dog, mammal, animal, etc.[2] The categories with the highest abstraction are those furthest removed or generalized from Lucius. This concept has been employed in many ways. Educators cultivate a student's ability to discover patterns that organize facts, employing abstraction as part of the learning process.[3] Film scholars analyze the degrees to which literal content is presented in abstract form, speaking in the evolving terms of realism and formalism.[4] Theorists of new music use the abstraction ladder to analyze the transformation of content throughout a composition.[5] Thus, in naming the triangle, Emily found herself the focus of the educational efforts of a philosopher, a geometry teacher, and an art historian, all of whom wanted her to make connections between the specific thing she named and more general concepts about that kind of thing.

The concept of removal is central to the use of *abstraction* by Schiller and Hegel. Schiller described the dichotomy between the demands of reason and those of life in terms of removal: "While the speculative spirit strove after imperishable possessions in the realm of ideas, it had to become a stranger in the material world, and relinquish matter for the sake of form." He observed in this connection that "the abstract thinker

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[1]Rudolph Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 153.

[2]S. I. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).

[3]Anita Brostoff, "Coherence: 'Next to' Is Not 'Connected to,'" *College Composition and Communication* 32, no. 3 (October 1, 1981): 278–94; Yasuhiko Kato, "Young Children's Representations of Groups of Objects: The Relationship between Abstraction and Representation," *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* 33, no. 1 (2002): 30–45.

[4]Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, 12th ed. (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 2011).

[5]Xavier Amatriain, "Content-Based Transformations," *Journal of New Music Research* 32, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 95–114.

very often has a cold heart."[6] Hegel used the same concept. For example, he referred to the "unexperienced" thought or sensation as "abstract." It is removed from actualized self-consciousness.[7] In relation to fine art, Hegel used the concept to describe the artist who needs to "abstract" himself from the culture around him, creating for himself, "by means of peculiar education or removal from the relations of life, a peculiar solitude."[8]

While the core idea of abstraction as removal or generalization holds across the period of our literature, it nevertheless raises more issues. Abstraction cannot be understood except in relation to a specific thing, a referent. The triangle that Emily named was the referent against which the abstraction of the other concepts can be measured. One might say, for example, that the philosopher's questions were more abstract than the geometry teacher's formulae. Interestingly, one might also conclude that the artist's comment about Kandinsky would be the least abstract idea: here, as it were, are more ways to draw triangles.

The relationship between abstraction and referent is part of the structure of Hegel's idealism—and, as a matter of aesthetics, is a source of difficulty. Using the concept of removal or generalization, he commented on Plato's insistence that objects of philosophical study "should be apprehended, not in their *particularity*, but in their *universality* [original emphasis]." Goodness, beauty, and truth did not consist in individual instances or singular actions, but in goodness, beauty, and truth as ideal entities. Hegel did not dismiss Plato's theory, but said that "the Platonic abstraction must not satisfy us, even for the logical idea of beauty. We must understand this idea more profoundly and more in the concrete, for the emptiness of content which characterizes the

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[6]Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 42.

[7]G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 21.

[8]G. W. F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Inwood, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 13.

Platonic idea is no longer satisfactory to . . . the mind of today." Hegel demanded more

movement from abstraction to its referents. Platonic abstractions could only serve as "the

mere beginning" of such work in aesthetics.[9]

Another issue raised by the concept of removal from a referent is the space

between the abstraction and the singularity. Abstraction involves comparison. It is a

relational, reflective procedure that moves between general and particular the way sound

resonates between the instrument, the ear, and the space they occupy, creating an

emotional atmosphere, or the way an image evokes a memory or a feeling. The energy of

connection between general and particular flows in both directions. Each abstract insight

Emily apprehends about triangles as a category can enrich her view of the triangle she

just drew, and her singular drawing can also enrich her overall concept of shape. The

charm of abstraction in art is precisely that it opens reflective space in one's imagination.

Schiller seemed to ground his rational optimism in this reflective space. He

wrote, "When abstraction mounts as high as it possibly can, it arrives at two final

concepts, at which it must halt and recognize its limits. It distinguishes in Man something

that endures and something that perpetually alters." Schiller heard the call of transcendent

potential for human beings in divinity itself.[10] For him, the "play impulse" that beauty

empowers took place between the enduring and the mutable:

> Hence flow two contrary demands upon Man, the two fundamental laws of his
> sensuous-rational nature. The first insists upon absolute reality: he is to turn
> everything that is mere form into world, and realize all his potentialities; the second
> insists upon absolute formality: he is to eradicate in himself everything that is
> merely world, and produce harmony in all its mutations; in other words, he is to turn
> outward everything internal, and give form to everything external. Both tasks,
> considered in their supreme fulfilment, lead back to the conception of divinity from
> which I started.[11]

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[9]Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 25.

[10]Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 60–61.

[11]Ibid., 63–64.

The potential for the play impulse to free the human will to realize its potential was found in the reflective space between abstract and particular.

The term *abstraction* came to be blurred in modernist writing, a muddled usage evident from early formulations of modernist theory all the way to current discourse. In painting, for example, the muddle seems to come from the use of the same word for two different purposes. One purpose was to describe the procedure by which painters arrived at their new style—by removal of their images from natural representation. Mondrian described how he progressively abstracted curvature away from lines, leaving only straight ones.[12] Similarly, Kandinsky said that abandoning the modeling involved in the third dimension and remaining within a two-dimensional plane was an abstract step.[13] Another purpose was to name the style of painting. Kandinsky uses an opposition between "objective" and "abstract" art as a way to distinguish the two.[14] Mondrian also uses the name "abstract art," though he sometimes refers to "Abstract-Real painting" to express the process behind the style.[15] Neither artist adopted the term abstract as a favored name for their style, Mondrian preferring "neo-plastic" and Kandinsky preferring the term "spiritual." In 1932, the Association of Abstraction-Creation explained that they used the terms *non-figuration*, *abstraction,* and *creation* because they could not find others that were "less obscure or less controversial." Their reproductions of works could define the terms, but "we are not particularly committed to them in other respects."[16] This

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[12]Piet Mondrian, "Dialogue on the New Plastic," in *Art in Theory, 1900 - 2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 286.

[13]Wassily Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, ed. Hilla Rebay (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1946), 77.

[14]Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, trans. Hilla Rebay and Howard Dearstyne (New York: Dover Publications, 1979), 53, 103–4.

[15]Mondrian, "Dialogue on the New Plastic," 286–87.

[16]"Abstraction-Creation: Editorial Statements to Cahiers Nos. 1, 1932 and 2, 1933," in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 374.

ambivalence about "abstract art" has returned in contemporary scholarship, as thinkers cannot escape the fact that the works labeled in this way are not free of references to reality and are themselves concrete objects.[17]

The definition of abstraction used in this study, then, is removal or generalization from a referent that invites comparison. The comparative space can be open-ended, allowing freedom of reflection and association between ideas. This definition not only allows us to understand some of the structure of Hegelian aesthetics but also to see how modernists often used Hegel's system selectively.

Abstraction in Schiller and Hegel

The irony of modernist aesthetics is that its philosophical progenitors saw abstraction as a danger. Schiller and Hegel viewed the intellect as a necessary but problematic influence in artistry. On the one hand, the fine arts needed abstraction in order to speak to a culture seeking transcendence through reason. On the other, the arts would lose their physical power if ideal purity suffocated living vitality. In spite of the danger, Schiller and Hegel demanded a relentless pursuit of the ideal.

Schiller, as noted above, faulted the abstract thinker for being cold-hearted, having no ability to assimilate a process of change in real time. "While the speculative spirit strove after imperishable possessions in the realm of ideas, it had to become a stranger in the material world, and relinquish matter for the sake of form." Beauty could not be understood essentially as the ideal.[18]

Plato's idealism was not sufficient as an understanding of Beauty for Hegel either. Hegel was more pointed than Schiller, however, in applying the principle to the fine arts. The culture was "not favourable to art." The artist faced two dangers from "the

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[17]Michael Betancourt, "A Taxonomy of Abstract Form Using Studies of Synesthesia and Hallucinations," *Leonardo* 40, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 59.

[18]Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 42.

universal habit of having an opinion and passing judgement about art." One was being misled into "putting more abstract thought into his works themselves."[19] (Hegel went so far as to say that art's content "should not be anything abstract in itself.")[20] The other danger, in words already quoted, was that "it is impossible for him to abstract from [his culture] by will and resolve, or to contrive for himself and bring to pass, by means of peculiar education or removal from the relations of life, a peculiar solitude that would replace all that is lost."[21] Hegel would have called Adrian Leverkühn's Faustian bargain nonsensical. No artist can be removed from his own culture.

Since abstraction might lure artists into the folly of cold idealism, how did Schiller and Hegel categorize beauty?

Schiller located beauty neither in his concept of the formal impulse, where it would be abstract, nor in the material impulse, where it would be concrete. Beauty was found in the play impulse, "a happy midway point between law and exigency" at which our nature was not constrained by either one.[22] The crucial role of the fine arts was that of inducing the play impulse through the unity of abstraction and concreteness. This was, after all, the key to human freedom.

How did the play impulse actually work? Schiller's attempts to explain it created more tangled questions. With beauty, he said, one steps "into the world of ideas—but, it must be observed, without thereby leaving the world of sense." Intellect without beauty was "the pure product of abstraction from everything that is material and contingent" with no room for subjectivity. Beauty, by contrast, requires physical perception and inner experience. The pleasure of beauty is that "reflection is so

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[19]Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 13.

[20]Ibid., 76.

[21]Ibid., 13.

[22]Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 77–78.

completely intermingled with feeling that we believe ourselves to perceive form immediately."[23] So, what was this feeling of perceiving form "immediately"? Was it a sensation or a thought? Did the feeling come from the material of the art or the conception?

Schiller tangled the issues even more. He said that the material of an artwork reinforced the claims of the senses, that "the wholeness of Man is affected by the form alone, and only individual powers by the content," or sense impressions. The spirit must be free.

> Therefore, the real artistic secret of the master consists in his annihilating the material by means of the form, and the more imposing, arrogant and alluring the material is in itself, the more autocratically it obtrudes itself in its operation, and the more inclined the beholder is to engage immediately with the material, the more triumphant is the art which forces back material and asserts its mastery over form. The nature of the man who sees or hears the work must remain completely free and inviolate, it must go forth from the magic circle of the artist pure and perfect as from the Creator's hands.[24]

Precisely how this "magic circle" comes to be Schiller did not specify. Readers are left to ponder the practical implications of this sweeping idealist mandate for themselves. Perhaps they would be able to behold beauty in an ancient statue of Zeus, transfixed by the proportions of Zeus's form rather than by the skill of the carving, yet without leaving the world sensation entirely. Or perhaps not.

For a sculptor who adhered to this creed, the obligation to ensure that the "form" of his Zeus was truly "annihilating" his "autocratic" marble loomed over his conscience. And the significance of humanity's aesthetic education was profound, according to Schiller's peroration. It was nothing less than the consummation of human solidarity and happiness.

> It is only the Beautiful that we enjoy at the same time as individual and as race, that is, as representatives of the race. Sensuous good can make only one happy man,

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[23]Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 121–22.

[24]Ibid., 106–7.

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since it is based on appropriation, which always implies exclusion; it can also make this one man only partially happy, because the personality does not share in it. . . . Beauty alone makes all the world happy, and every being forgets its limitations as long as it experiences her enchantment.[25]

If the solidarity of the human race could only be achieved through beauty perceived in this way, the sculptor had better get his statue right.

Hegel agreed with Schiller on two crucial issues, but formulated them in ways that multiplied the complexities of artistic obligation. First, he agreed with Schiller that abstraction posed a problem for the fine arts. Hegel said that "the beauty of art does in fact appear in a form which is expressly contrasted with abstract thought." Indeed, abstraction destroyed the form of beauty in art by its very nature. The same was true of all life, which he said "is disfigured and slain by comprehension." The more we understand about ourselves, the more our life is "absolutely dissociated from us, so that, by the use of thought as the means of grasping what has life, man rather cuts himself off from this his purpose."[26] Adding more abstraction to artworks, then, would not revitalize the fine arts in modern culture. Second, Hegel agreed with Schiller that the fine arts could preserve human freedom by uniting form and nature. Hegel said that "artistic beauty [was] one of the means which resolve and reduce to unity" the conflict between duty and feeling.[27] But Hegel went further than Schiller in describing how the fine arts brought this unity about. If Schiller left artists with a vague mandate about the "magic circle" of purity, Hegel delivered a scientific itemization of that mandate that remains excruciating in its intricacy.

Hegel's opening move was promising. He showed how aesthetics might depart from Platonic abstractions. Unlike Schiller, who placed beauty in the play impulse but said little about what one actually sees in that state, Hegel developed a concrete theory of

[25]Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 138–39.

[26]Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 14.

[27]Ibid., 62.

beauty itself.

Hegel approved of a theory articulated by his friend Aloys Hirt (1759-1839), a professor of archaeology in Berlin, who said that beauty was in "the characteristic." We call a painting, sculpture, or building beautiful when we consider the work's "individual marks," the qualities that "constitute a definite essence," and when those individual marks are "adequate to the aim" of the artist for that work.[28] Beauty is in the details. The marks of uniqueness, brought together in a well-conceived and unified work, are the essence of what we admire. Hegel expands on Hirt's theory:

> This formula gives us at once something more significant than the other definitions [of beauty]. If we go on to ask what 'the characteristic' is, we see that it involves in the first place *a content*, as, for instance, a particular feeling, situation, incident, action, individual; and secondly, the *mode* and *fashion* in which this content is embodied in a representation [original emphasis]. It is to this, the mode of representation, that the artistic law of the 'characteristic' refers, inasmuch as it requires that every particular element in the mode of expression shall subserve the definite indication of its content and be a member in the expression of that content. The abstract formula of the characteristic thus has reference to the degree of appropriateness with which the particular detail of the artistic form sets in relief the content which it is intended to represent.[29]

Hirt's theory sped away from any Platonic idealism in the opposite of direction of particularity. Beauty is concrete. Beauty is not universal but individual. The concept nicely served Hegel's project of retooling the fine arts for the modern age, permitting him to speak of an artwork's "soul" or "significance" without recourse to abstractions. Hegel said that "the human eye, a man's face, flesh, skin, his whole figure, are a revelation of mind and soul." A work's soul emerges by means of "mere particular lines, curves, surfaces, borings, reliefs in the stone, in these colours, tones, sounds, of words, or whatever other medium is employed." These features of appearance "should reveal life, feeling, soul, import and mind." Hegel concluded, "Thus the requirement of *significance* in a work of art amounts to hardly anything beyond or different from Hirt's principle of

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[28]Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 20.

[29]Ibid., 21.

the *characteristic* [original emphasis]."[30]

This line of thought might have opened an alternative account of the power of the fine arts. One can imagine how abstraction and concreteness might work together in an artist's strategy for an object. But Hegel cannot follow this line. His system doesn't allow him.

Having rejected abstraction in relation to beauty, Hegel nevertheless demanded more abstraction from artists. They had to participate in the dialectic. In his earlier, more comprehensive work, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel analyzed the dialectical process by which Spirit realizes itself through deepening consciousness: "reflection in otherness within itself—not an original or immediate unity as such—is the True."[31] The dialectic is the Spirit's ever-advancing process of making its thought external, then assimilating that self-awareness back into itself. The abstract character of Hegel's language here reveals the problem artists faced in applying his thinking to art. If "reflection in otherness within itself" constitutes truth, the aesthetic mandate might be profound. But what it might mean for brushstrokes on canvas is far from clear.

Hegel's *Phenomenology* applied the dialectic to fine art. An artist becomes part of the dialectic when he gives up "the *synthetic* effort to blend the heterogeneous forms of thought and natural objects." These words, which might seem entirely conceptual, in fact make a specific historical claim. The ancient classical action of combining abstractions about deity, proportion, power, and beauty into a natural shape, that of a bearded man, created an object of devotion—a statue of Zeus. But Hegel was arguing that the Spirit had already assimilated this object into its consciousness. The "synthesis" of that period was done. So the artist becomes "a spiritual worker" when his object gains

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[30]Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 23.

[31]Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 10.

"the form of self-conscious activity."[32] In some way, a statue must express an antithesis that the Spirit contemplates through the self-conscious work of the artist. Hegel said again:

> This makes the act a spiritual movement, because it is this twofold process, on the one hand, of superseding the *abstraction* of the divine Being (which is how devotion determines its object) and making it actual, and, on the other hand, of superseding the actual (which is how the doer determines the object and himself) and raising it into a universality.[33]

Such statements might somehow be more complete in theory than Schiller's "magic circle." But what did they imply the sculptor should do with the chisel? How should the sculptor "supersede the actual"?

Hegel's *Lectures* illustrate the dialectical mandate for artistry using the Romantic movement. With Classical art, the progress of the Spirit stalled. Statues of Zeus offered nothing more for consciousness. Romanticism, Hegel said, made the "inwardness" of mind an object of knowledge in itself. "The elevation of the latent or potential into self-conscious knowledge produces an enormous difference," the difference between immediate sense experience and self-knowledge.[34] Just as the Christian God can only be known through spiritual apprehension, not through sensuous apprehension, so romantic art is known inwardly. "In this way romantic art must be considered as art transcending itself, while remaining within the artistic sphere and in artistic form." Hegel summarizes:

> It is this inner world that forms the content of the romantic, and must therefore find its representation as such inward feeling, and in the show or presentation of such feeling. The world of inwardness celebrates its triumph over the outer world, and actually in the sphere of the outer and in its medium manifests this its victory, owing to which the sensuous appearance sinks into worthlessness.[35]

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[32]Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 424.

[33]Ibid., 433–34.

[34]Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 85–86.

[35]Ibid., 87.

These words are like Schiller's notion of the artistic master annihilating the autocratic material of a work by means of the form.

Hegel narrated how the fine arts progressed to the romantic consciousness, the triumph of inwardness. Architecture created the sacred enclosure in which the classical deities like Zeus could be worshipped. The unification of the ideas of proportion and balance with the material of stone was limited, however, and architecture itself was not able to liberate the ideas from the material.[36] Sculpture unified the ideal classical Zeus with the material of stone in a "lightning-flash of individuality."[37] Still, sculpture was not able to free the idea from the grip of the material. The romantic came to fruition in painting, which was closer to the inward world of the idea because it lacked the third dimension of architecture and sculpture, having only a flat plane. Painting, in other words, was more removed from the real world by the nature of its art, making the idea more directly apparent to human consciousness. A painting of Zeus and Europa spoke more inwardly than the statue of Zeus. The romantic also came to fruition in music, which was even more removed from real-world sensuality than painting. Music's presentation of idea was merely in sound, making the idea go almost directly into human consciousness.[38] The romantic finally came to fruition in poetry, which was so removed from the sensuous world as to be presented exclusively in words.[39]

For Hegel, the dialectic actualized abstract ideas through artistic means. But, to move the dialectic forward, those artistic means had to feature ever more abstraction—greater removal from the world of sense experience. This is, in fact, how Hegel concluded his lecture on the types of arts:

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[36]Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 90–91.

[37]Ibid., 91–92.

[38]Ibid., 94–95.

[39]Ibid., 95–96.

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> And, therefore, what the particular arts realize in individual works of art are according to their abstract conception simply the 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.[40]

The future of the fine arts would be the ever-greater unfolding of the world of inwardness.

The problem in both Schiller and Hegel is that they argue for beauty that is concrete, warning against abstraction in art, while requiring ever more abstraction from the artist in the outworking of his ideas. Schiller's idealism demands a master who can annihilate the material with the form. Hegel's idealism demands that the artist become a dialectician who, like the romantics, can seize the next technique for freeing the idea from the shape. In Hegel's explanation, romanticism seemed well-accounted for and the progress of consciousness seemed assured. But what would the Spirit require for its next evolution? What would be the antithesis of romanticism?

Abstraction in Hazlitt

Parallel to continental views of aesthetics, William Hazlitt developed a theory of abstraction that was founded on his psychology (described in the previous chapter). Where Schiller and Hegel labored to preserve the legitimacy of reason within the boundaries of idealism, Hazlitt rejected closed systems altogether. Where Schiller and Hegel privileged abstract reason over human nature, Hazlitt did the reverse. Schiller and Hegel tried to carve out a place for human freedom in the "magic circle" of artistry, while Hazlitt said freedom was a given. In Schiller's and Hegel's accounts of aesthetics, they first questioned abstraction in the fine arts, only to demand it from artists more and more. In Hazlitt's account, by contrast, abstraction was reframed in such a way that the dichotomy between form and material disappeared. He offered a way to understand an

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[40]Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 97.

artist's responsibility that allows an escape from the abstraction spiral of Hegel's dialectic.

The escape begins with Hazlitt's psychology. In his "Lectures on English Philosophy," Hazlitt denied John Locke's assertion that ideas came from sense impressions—giving a more elaborate version of Hazlitt's earlier argument in the "Prospectus," quoted in the previous chapter. Hazlitt said "that ideas are the offspring of the understanding, not of the senses." A sensation is "the perception produced by the impression of the several parts of an outward object, each by itself, on the correspondent parts of an organised sentient being." Hazlitt's specificity about "the several parts" of an outward object was foundational to the way he would frame abstraction. The senses—the parts of "an organized, sentient being"—only impressed the mind with isolated parts of objects—the leg of a table, for instance. The senses did not combine the parts into a whole—the table itself. That task belonged to "the understanding," which arranged the impressions into a "conception," or idea.[41] As described before, Hazlitt saw no need to reconcile the senses with reason because reflective freedom was already built into the mind. Sense impressions went nowhere on their own.

On this basis, Hazlitt asserted his alternative theory of abstraction. Lockeans, he said, considered abstraction to be "the ornament and top addition of the mind of man, which proceeding from simple sensations upwards, is gradually sublimed into the abstract notions of things." Hazlitt said "that I do not think it possible ever to arrive at a demonstration of generals or abstractions by beginning in Mr. Locke's method with particular ones." Hazlitt even made this startling claim:

> I conceive that all our notions from first to last, are strictly speaking, general and abstract, not absolute and particular; and that to have a perfectly distinct idea of any one individual thing, or concrete existence, either as to the parts of which it is composed, or the differences belonging to it, or the circumstances connected with it,

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[41]William Hazlitt, "Lectures on English Philosophy," in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930), 2:151.

would imply an unlimited power of comprehension in the human mind, which is impossible.[42]

The reason Locke's account of ideas could not demonstrate abstractions lay in a false attribution of simplicity both to the outward objects of perception and to the inward ideas of those objects. As to the ideas, Hazlitt said they could not be considered simple unities in the mind at all:

> Every idea of a sensible quality, as of the whiteness of the sheet of paper before me, or the hardness of the table on which I lean, implies the same power of generalization of connecting several impressions into one sort, as the most refined and abstract idea of virtue and justice, of motion, or extension, or space of time, or being itself.[43]

The inward conceptions of qualities like whiteness must involve combinations of different impressions because whiteness is a meaningless quality without comparison to other qualities, like redness, greenness, or other impressions of whiteness. The treatment of such ideas as simple ignored the abstractions essential to them. The principle was no less true of objects themselves. Hazlitt notes that one objection to the existence of abstract ideas in the mind at all is "falsely attributing individuality, or absolute unity, to the objects of sense." The objects are not simple, but composed of particularities, and "there is no abstracting from absolute unity." Hazlitt counters that, far from being unities, outward objects are so complex that the mind cannot comprehend their parts:

> Now abstraction is a necessary consequence of the limitation of this power of the mind, and if it were a previous condition of our having the ideas of things that we should comprehend distinctly all the particulars of which they are composed, we could have no ideas at all. An imperfectly comprehended [thing] is a general idea. But the mind perfectly comprehends the whole of no one object.[44]

This insight is what led Hazlitt to assert that every idea in the mind was abstract. He observed, "Instead of its being true that all general ideas of extension are deducible to particular positive extension, the reverse proposition is I think demonstrable:

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[42]Hazlitt, "Lectures on English Philosophy," 2:191.

[43]Ibid., 2:192.

[44]Ibid., 2:205.

that all particular extensions, the most positive and distinct, are never any thing else than

a more or less vague notion of extension in general." The human mind works from

general ideas to particular ones, not the other way around. When Emily draws triangles,

she starts with a name attached to a thing, and on that basis is able to include more and

more particularities. Hazlitt gave the example of measuring:

> The proof that our ideas of particular things are not themselves particular, is the uncertainty and difficulty we have only in comparing them with one another. In looking at a line an inch long, I have a certain general impression of it, so that I can tell it is shorter than another, three or four times as long, drawn on the same sheet of paper; but I cannot immediately tell that it is shorter than one only a tenth or twentieth of an inch longer. The idea which I have of it is therefore not an exact one.[45]

Hazlitt gives an account of human intelligence that emphasizes individuation as an

endpoint of thought, with abstraction only as a beginning.

This is the context in which Hazlitt comments on art, specifically painting. Roy

Park attributes the origin of Hazlitt's philosophical theory of abstraction to his early

training as a painter and to his "twenty-year preoccupation" with the two fields.[46] Hazlitt

used his artistic experience to elaborate on the impossibility of having "particular and

absolute ideas of things":

> The ablest painters have never been able to give more than one part of nature, in abstracted views of things. The most laborious artists never finished to perfection any one part of an object, or had ever any more than a confused, vague, uncertain notion of the shape of the mouth or nose, or the colour of an eye. Ask a logician, or any common man, and he will no doubt tell you that a face is a face, a nose is a nose, a tree is a tree, and that he can see what it is as well as another. Ask a painter and he will tell you otherwise.[47]

For Hazlitt, human intelligence expressed itself most powerfully in the fine arts, which

revealed not the general categories of objects, but in their unique characteristics. Emily

keeps drawing triangles because of all the different possibilities the general category

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[45]Hazlitt, "Lectures on English Philosophy," 2:208.

[46]Roy Park, *Hazlitt and the Spirit of the Age: Abstraction and Critical Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 96–97.

[47]Hazlitt, "Lectures on English Philosophy," 2:207.

offers. The expressive individuations are limitless.

When comparing Hazlitt with Schiller and Hegel, two points seem especially important.

First, Hazlitt's account of abstraction was not trapped in the continental psychology of human freedom. Hazlitt rejected the presuppositions that left idealists tangled in a thicket of conflicting mandates. Specifically, he denied that ideas were produced by sense impressions, countering that ideas were formed by the understanding. Further, Hazlitt did not place ultimate reality in the realm of the abstract, as Schiller and Hegel did. He was not forced by an edict of reason to make a return trip to the ideal after collecting a few antitheses from sense experience. Consciousness wasn't that complex. Hazlitt worked from a unified psychology in which consciousness could be explained as a deepening awareness of particulars. Thus, where Schiller and Hegel left an artist with a mandate to realize abstract potentialities through artworks that were increasingly abstract themselves, Hazlitt left artists with a serenely straightforward mission. Do what you do best: individuate.

Second, there is a striking similarity between Hazlitt's theory of abstraction and Hegel's account of beauty. As already noted, Hegel not only asserted that an idealist account of beauty was insufficient, but also that beauty consisted in a combination of particular qualities. The measurement of whether an artwork was beautiful consisted in how successfully its specific characteristics came together to meet the artist's goals. Hazlitt argued that a painter would never agree that "a nose is a nose" because the painter looks for particularities. Both thinkers put the same emphasis on the importance of "the characteristic"—the individuated work. Both thinkers agreed that the combination of characteristics—the presentational coherence—was crucial to a work's success. Hazlitt and Hegel were working with the same model of what is aesthetically compelling. But Hegel's dialectical system pushed artists back toward abstraction in the name of freedom.

The dialectical model remained the dominant philosophical paradigm well into

the twentieth century. Hazlitt's theory dropped out of sight.

Abstraction in Modernism

In both painting and music, the artistic mandate from Hegel led to an increasing abstraction both in the content of artworks and the procedures behind them. Modernists viewed their audiences as participants in history, significant not in their individual but their collective experience. The bourgeois audience was enslaved by economic structures that destroyed any possibility of the individual freedom imagined by Schiller and Hegel. With such limited potential, the most important human need was to become conscious of enslavement. Modernists viewed consciousness as the last zone of human freedom.

In music and painting, then, artists sought to present an antithesis to modern life that was so withdrawn, so removed from bourgeois subjective experience, that it would shock them into conscious of the truth. Musical works, for some theorists, became sound worlds of their own, following laws that were incomprehensible to the ear. Paintings also became removed from the shared world of representation, becoming instead expressions of the inner truth of the painters. The mode of expression in modernists artworks was the abstraction itself.

Wilhelm Worringer

A key theorist was Wilhelm Worringer (1881-1965), an art historian who taught at the University of Bonn. His 1906 dissertation describing the art of empathy and the art of abstraction became influential to Expressionist theorists and artists, and was reprinted continuously for four decades.

Worringer taught that the field of aesthetics no longer started with the beauty of an object. Modern aesthetics "proceeds from the behavior of the contemplating subject," culminating in a theory not so much of beauty but of enjoyment. "Just as the urge to empathy as a preassumption of aesthetic experience finds its gratification in the

beauty of the organic, so the urge to abstraction finds its beauty in the life-denying inorganic, in the crystalline or, in general terms, in all abstract law and necessity."[48] The contemplating subject, in certain historical conditions, seeks a more remote enjoyment than the representation of life.

Worringer developed the notion of the "contemplating subject," defining aesthetic enjoyment as "objectified self-enjoyment." He said, "To enjoy aesthetically means to enjoy myself in a sensuous object diverse from myself, to empathize myself into it."[49] This was a categorical shift. The aesthetic value of an object, in this formulation, had little to do with standards of beauty, whether it was the object's conformity to Platonic ideals, or its successful combination of characteristics, or any other standard. The idea of a reflective space, in which a person is drawn out of sense experience to the apprehension of beauty embodied in an artwork, is not needed in Worringer's subject-oriented aesthetic. He simply has no use for Schiller's "magic circle." The reflective space has been replaced by empathy—a direct projection of the self into an object. "The value of a line, of a form consists for us in the value of the life that it holds for us. It holds its beauty only through our own vital feeling, which, in some mysterious manner, we project into it."[50]

The reason for this shift is the mandate of freedom, the necessity that human beings resist being shackled by an oppressive rationalism. In Worringer's narrative, human beings had a spiritual dread of the world. "The rationalistic development of mankind pressed back this instinctive fear conditioned by man's feeling of being lost in the universe."[51] Empathy was the enjoyment of self in the organic world, made safe for

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[48]Wilhelm Worringer, "From Abstraction and Empathy," in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 66.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Ibid., 67.

[51]Ibid., 68.

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the human spirit by rational understanding. But when that understanding failed to make the world safe for the human spirit, abstraction became necessary. "The less mankind has succeeded, by virtue of its spiritual cognition, in entering into a relation of friendly confidence with the appearance of the outer world, the more forceful is the dynamic that leads to the striving after this highest abstract beauty."[52] Rather than desiring self-projection, the human being seeks self-alienation.

> In the urge to abstraction the intensity of the self-alienative impulse is characterized, as in the need for empathy, by an urge to alienate oneself from individual being, but as an urge to seek deliverance from the fortuitousness of humanity as a whole, from the seeming arbitrariness of organic existence in general, in the contemplation of something necessary and irrefragable.[53]

The signature of modernism became the release of self through abstraction, the dissolution of personality. Paradoxically, the abstraction was not governed by rational objectivity, but by a dive down to intuition. The works many audiences viewed as impersonal, cold, and austere were viewed by the artists as the ultimate expression of feeling.

Art historian Dora Vallier said that Worringer's concept of empathy "expresses a state in which feeling, as a sovereign alchemy, links the human creature to the surrounding world," and "accentuates very strongly the inward significance of form and, at the same time, renders secondary the reading of the things it represents." She credited Worringer's theory with providing the structure in which abstraction could "be studied, for the first time, as the opposite—but symmetrical—pole to figuration."[54] Further, Vallier presented Worringer's emphasis on the subjective response to art as a foundation for Mondrian's search for a pure spiritual language in visual art[55] and Kandinsky's strict

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[52]Worringer, "From Abstraction and Empathy," 69.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Dora Vallier, *Abstract Art: A History and Analysis of a Main Current in Twentieth Century Art*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: The Orion Press, 1970), 15.

[55]Ibid., 87–88.

dichotomy between the real external world and the abstract intuitive world.[56] In Vallier's account, abstraction was a move away from rationalism, grounded "in separating reality from realism and in finding, for this 'new' reality, a possibility of communication apart from the intellect."[57] This possibility, for her, secured human life against rationalism: "So we see art allying itself with man against the leveling caused by scientific progress, and fulfilling in this day and age, under the sign of abstraction, the function it has always had: to guarantee to the human being a precinct of survival."[58]

Worringer's theory of abstraction and empathy, then, provided a rationale for artists to resist what they saw as the oppression of rationalism. He articulated a fundamental shift in ways to think about art.

Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian

In his books *On the Spiritual in Art* and *Point and Line to Plane*, Kandinsky expounded the theory behind his painting techniques. For him, the artist was a prophet who revealed spiritual truth to the masses enslaved in ignorance. What he revealed, however, was not the rational insight of the philosopher. Kandinsky had a view of human potential and need that overlapped significantly with dialectical views, but like Worringer he no longer felt a call to harmonize reason and freedom, following instead the call of truth beyond reason. For Kandinsky, this was a call to discover a harmony between the vocabulary of painting and the vibrations of the human spirit. He wrote, for example, "that colour harmony can rest only on the principle of the corresponding vibration of the human soul. This basis can be considered as the principle of innermost necessity."[59]

Because of the power he found in intuition, Kandinsky made a sharp

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[56]Vallier, *Abstract Art*, 81.

[57]Ibid., 306.

[58]Ibid., 308.

[59]Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, 43.

distinction between realism and abstraction: realism was indirect communication while abstraction was direct, a release of the true sound of the world.[60] He said, for instance, that there were two kinds of form. Realism sought to "superimpose" a material object on a flat surface, which he viewed as a corruption of painting, an artifice that stained the purity of intuition. Abstraction, by contrast, "represents no object of reality but in itself is a fully abstract being." In another instance, he called abstractions "beings" that "possess their own life, their own influence, and their own value." He was not shy about listing what these beings were: "a square, a circle, a triangle, a rhombus, a trapezoid, and innumerable other forms becoming more complicated with no mathematical designation." The beings "occupy space in the realm of the non-objective."[61] In still another instance, he said, "The point digs itself into the plane and asserts itself for all time. Thus it presents the briefest, constant, innermost assertion: short, fixed and quickly created."[62] This "innermost assertion" of the point on a plane was a more direct expression of feeling than the "veiled" expressions of realism. The abstract point allows feeling to attain "its full, unveiled sound."[63]

The artist's task, according to Kandinsky, is to select the abstract forms that harmonize with his feelings—the "principle of inner necessity." He said, "The freer the abstract form, the purer and more primitive is its appeal." So the artist needs to choose "de-materialized" objects because the material reality of his image is "more or less superfluous." What governs these choices is not reason but intuition. "In any case of translation into the abstract or the employment of non-objective forms, the artist's sole judge, guide, and principal consideration should be his feeling." With practice and

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[60]Jonathan A. Anderson and William A. Dyrness, *Modern Art and the Life of a Culture: The Religious Impulses of Modernism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 187.

[61]Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, 48.

[62]Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane*, 32.

[63]Ibid., 53.

exposure, both the artist and the viewer will become more comfortable "in the realm of the non-objective."[64]

Mondrian, like Kandinsky, saw abstraction as the most direct expression of feeling. Abstraction was not an escape from the world, but a deeper perception of it.[65] In his "Dialogue on the New Plastic" between a singer and a painter, Mondrian has the singer say that she responded to his earlier, more realistic paintings, but as for the new ones, "I see nothing in these rectangles." Mondrian answers that both periods had the same aim, but that the new paintings were more clear. His aim was to "express relationships plastically through oppositions of color and line."[66] As with Kandinsky, realism veiled the feeling expressed in painting. Abstraction was more direct in establishing an opposition between forms, and the tension produced by such oppositions was the source of feeling. "Relationship is what I have always sought, and that is what all painting seeks to express." Regardless of the style, Mondrian said, the viewer needed to look at a painting more strictly. "In painting you must first try to see composition, color, and line and not the representation as representation. Then you will finally come to feel the subject matter a hindrance."[67] Mondrian acknowledged the misunderstanding of the "new plastic" as cold, and said that the more abstract style was the product of both deeper feeling and deeper intellect. "When feeling is deepened, in many eyes it is destroyed. That is why the deeper emotion of the New Plastic is so little understood. But one must learn to see Abstract-Real painting, just as the painter had to learn to create in an abstract-real way."

This move to abstraction, however, was more than a stylistic change for

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[64]Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, 51–52.

[65]Anderson and Dyrness, *Modern Art*, 182.

[66]Mondrian, "Dialogue on the New Plastic," 284.

[67]Ibid., 285.

Mondrian. Truth demanded it. When the singer says a straight line is barren of significance, he replies, "The straight line tells the truth; and the significance you want it to have is of no value for painting; such significance is literary, preconceived. Painting has to be purely plastic, and in order to achieve this it must use plastic means that do not signify the individual. This also justifies the use of rectangular color planes."[68] The individual and the "literary" must be driven out of painting, so that the visual relationships alone remain. As we've seen before, Mondrian did not think the progress of history could be reversed.

> The New Plastic could not return to naturalistic or form expression, for it grew out of these. It is bound to the fixed law of art, which as I said, is the unity of man and nature. If in this duality the New Plastic is to create pure relationships and therefore unity, it cannot allow the natural to predominate; therefore, it must remain abstract.[69]

He strengthened the point in other writings. The purpose of abstraction was to drive out the subjectivity of the individual in favor of a universal subjectivity.

> Logic demands that art be the plastic expression of our whole being: therefore, it must be equally the plastic appearance of the nonindividual, the absolute and annihilating opposition of subjective sensations. That is, it must also be the direct expression of the universal in us which is the exact appearance of the universal outside us.[70]

For Mondrian and Kandinsky, then, abstraction was both a more direct expression of feeling and a more powerful embodiment of universality. It was a way of connecting human beings to the world, a necessary step in the progress of history toward the unity of all the arts. Kandinsky wrote,

> Fundamentally, this same abstract, law-abiding quality is most certainly the property of other art expressions. The spatial elements in sculpture and architecture, the dance, and the word elements in poetry, all have need of a similar uncovering and a similar elementary comparison with respect to their external and their inner

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[68]Mondrian, "Dialogue on the New Plastic," 287.

[69]Ibid., 288.

[70]Piet Mondrian, "Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence," in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 289.

characteristics, which I call "sounds."[71]

Mondrian made a similar assertion: "Through the new spirit, man himself creates a new beauty, whereas in the past he only painted and described the beauty of nature. This new beauty has become indispensable to the new man, for in it he expresses his own image in equivalent opposition with nature. THE NEW ART IS BORN."[72] In his view, the new art was about the self-creation of human beings into a higher form of life.

Clement Greenberg

There could be no compromise once an artist embraced such principles. Any artist who would not engage in the same mission was a fraud. Any viewer who would not learn the new way of seeing a work was impeding the progress of the human race. This was the spirit in which Clement Greenberg wrote his famous essays on the avant-garde and abstraction. He said that the imperative to create abstract art came from history, which "holds the artist in a vise from which at the present moment he can escape only by surrendering his ambition and returning to a stale past."[73]

Greenberg's narrative for the origin of abstraction in visual art commenced with the avant-garde itself. The Western bourgeoisie produced a segment of people who possessed a "superior consciousness of history," and were able to criticize bourgeois society from the point of view of an "advanced intellectual conscience."[74] This avant-garde embarked on a search for "the absolute" and so arrived at "abstract" or "nonobjective" art. "The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape—not its picture—is aesthetically valid; something given, increate,

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[71]Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, 83.

[72]Mondrian, "Neo-Plasticism," 292.

[73]Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoön," in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 568.

[74]Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 540.

independent of meanings, similars or originals."[75] Greenberg was summarizing what Kandinsky and Mondrian had also said—art was to embody universals.

The universals required some objective basis, a more solid ground for making decisions than mere personal intuition. Therefore, the avant-garde began to imitate "the disciplines and processes of art and literature themselves," and this imitation was "the genesis of the 'abstract.'" The artist turned his attention away from subjects, turning it "in upon the medium of his own craft." The processes of creation provided objective limitations on abstraction, keeping the intuitive choices from becoming arbitrary.[76] The avant-garde saw "the necessity of an escape from ideas," shifted to "a new and greater emphasis upon form," and sought to break "the dominance of literature."[77] Visual art had to be rigorously non-cognitive.

With such a focus, Greenberg said, music became the ultimate model for artistic processes of creation. He affirmed the connections Kandinsky and Mondrian had asserted between painting and music, though he went somewhat further. "Because of its 'absolute' nature, its remoteness from imitation, its almost complete absorption in the very physical quality of its medium, as well as because of its resources of suggestion, music had come to replace poetry as the paragon art."[78]

Greenberg made two claims about music in this regard, both of which raise tangled questions about abstraction.

First, music could only be conceived in terms of sound. The avant-garde found that "the advantage of music lay chiefly in the fact that it was an 'abstract' art, an art of 'pure form.'" They found music to be "incapable, objectively, of communicating

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[75]Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 541.

[76]Ibid.

[77]Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoön," 564.

[78]Ibid., 565.

anything else than a sensation." They also found that music "could not be conceived in any other terms than those of the sense through which it entered the consciousness." By contrast, imitative paintings and poems contained elements that were "too often accidental to the formal natures of these arts." A painting might imitate the shape of a tree, which, Greenberg argued, was secondary to the nature of sight, and which had to be purged from painting to achieve formal purity.

> Only by accepting the example of music and defining each of the other arts solely in the terms of the sense or faculty which perceived its effect and by excluding from each art whatever is intelligible in the terms of any other sense or faculty would the non-musical arts attain the 'purity' and self-sufficiency which they desired; which they desired, that is, in so far as they were avant-garde arts.

An art like painting, then, sought to "borrow [music's] principles as a 'pure' art, as an art which is abstract because it is almost nothing else except sensuous."[79]

Second, Greenberg claimed that the principle of limiting an art to its sense medium, "derived from the example of music," made the artworks pure. "Purity in art consists in the acceptance, willing acceptance, of the limitations of the medium of the specific art." This was Greenberg's updated version of Gotthold Lessing's *Laocoön*,[80] in which Lessing had argued that painting and poetry were inherently limited by the nature of their media. Painting, for instance, was unable to show the passage of time the way a poem could. Greenberg said, "The arts, then, have been hunted back to their mediums, and there they have been isolated, concentrated and defined. It is by virtue of its medium that each art is unique and strictly itself." In painting, "The purely plastic or abstract qualities of the work of art are the only ones that count."[81] Anything literary was corrupting. The cognitive aspects of paintings merely borrowed from other arts.

Greenberg's account of abstraction as the removal of an art from any

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[79]Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoön," 565

[80]Gotthold Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1962).

[81]Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoön," 566.

associative or imitative ideas into its own sensual realm is riddled with incoherence. For example, his claim that music cannot be conceived as anything but sound would come as a shock to any singer concerned with diction—the clear enunciation of words. Clear and compelling diction is as much a part of the music as secure intonation. Greenberg seemed untroubled by the historical reality that music was inescapably bound to words through song and chant, or by the looming presence in the Western canon of cantatas, operas, and art songs, all of which not only depend on literary elements but even attempt to serve the words through rhythmic stress, affects like sighing motifs, and clear orchestration. He could not even have made the argument that modernist composers had transcended literary "corruption," since one of Schoenberg's breakthrough works was *Pierrot Lunaire*—a song cycle. The argument that music could be a model of abstraction in its freedom from cognitive or literary content was impossible to sustain. Music could not model a purity it did not possess.

More fatally, Greenberg seemed unaware that in his account of painting's new purity artists had merely switched from one borrowed principle to another. Supposedly, painting was corrupted by the alien influences of literature and ideas. However, in escaping those, painting had landed under the spell of another alien influence—sound. Even if one were to accept Greenberg's assertion that music is inherently non-cognitive, Greenberg made no attempt to justify the notion that visual imagery could attain the same state. He simply assumed that sight could acquire sound's attributes. Other theorists like Susanne Langer and Rudolph Arnheim argued that visual imagery was cognitive by its very nature. Greenberg did make a distinction: painters were not imitating music's effects, but rather its methodology.[82] But he still needed to establish that music contained no association with ideas or cognition. As stated, Greenberg's position was that painting is impure when influenced by literature, but pure when influenced by music.

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[82]Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoön," 565.

Greenberg's rhetoric for abstraction became ideological, not expository.

Arnold Schoenberg

Significantly, the composer Arnold Schoenberg described his art in ways that were antithetical to Greenberg's conception of music. To be sure, Schoenberg was motivated by a sense of duty to his art, and in that sense was in line with what Greenberg described as avant-garde. Schoenberg wrote of a period of artistic isolation in the 1920s, "While composing for me had been a pleasure, now it became a duty. I knew I had to fulfil a task: I had to express what was necessary to be expressed and I knew I had the duty of developing my ideas for the sake of progress in music, whether I liked it or not; but I also had to realize that the great majority of the public did not like it."[83] Still, he did not conceive of the art of composition as "pure," or free from any derivations outside the realm of sound. To the contrary, Schoenberg's abstract ideas about composition developed around an analogy between music and language.

Two caveats are needed before going any further. Schoenberg's music was a crucial reference point for painters in explaining their journey to abstraction. Mondrian conversed with a singer about the deeper emotions of modern music. Kandinsky singled out Schoenberg for high praise, saying that he "advocates full renunciation of conventional beauty sacreligiously, while accepting all those means leading to unconventional self expression."[84] He said that Schoenberg's "music leads us into a new realm where the musical experiences are not acoustic but purely soul inspiring."[85] Greenberg narrated the search for abstraction in relation to the "nature" of music.

The first caveat is that Mondrian, Kandinsky, and Greenberg were not

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[83]Arnold Schoenberg, "How One Becomes Lonely (1937)," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (New York: St. Martins Press, 1975), 53.

[84]Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, 30.

[85]Ibid., 31.

necessarily in agreement about the importance of abstraction, and so the lessons they claimed to derive from Schoenberg were not necessarily coherent with each other. Mondrian and Kandinsky saw modern music as tapping the sort of universal subjectivity that Worringer described, while Greenberg was working on an entirely different line of inquiry that sought to update Lessing's thesis about the limitations of artistic media. Music in general and Schoenberg in particular were being cited as influential in the development of abstraction using the broadest of criteria, which could be used to justify any number of ideological doctrines. Schoenberg himself noted the irony of how many different ideologies he was accused of, or praised for, advancing. By some critics, he was accused of writing music that was

> dry and without emotional expression. By others, in contrast, I was accused of exactly the opposite crime: I was called an old-fashioned romanticist and my style of expression was blamed for expressing personal feelings. Still others called me a decadent bourgeois, while one group called me Bolshevist. So I seemed to unite within myself every possible contrast: I was too dry and too sweet; I was a constructor and a romanticist; I was an innovator and I was old-fashioned; I was a bourgeois and a Bolshevik.[86]

So, the ideological uses to which Schoenberg's music was put have to be treated with skepticism.

The second caveat is that while Mondrian, Kandinsky, and Greenberg viewed abstraction as highly important, Schoenberg himself gave it little emphasis—to the extent he discussed it at all. Schoenberg had abstract concepts about music composition that are important to include in our study, but he did not extensively theorize about abstraction itself. For that reason, one does not find Schoenberg exulting about "the music of the future."[87] He would not even agree that he changed styles during his career, much less that he started a new age of humanity.[88] Nor does one find Schoenberg luxuriating in the

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[86]Schoenberg, "Lonely," 52.

[87]Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art*, 31.

[88]Schoenberg, "Lonely," 30.

purity of his sonic medium, or imagining that "music had come to replace poetry as the paragon art."[89] One does find him frequently in hard analysis of actual works of music, occasionally surfacing from his scores to express impatience with the generalizations of others.

Broadly, Schoenberg had two models for understanding music composition. Both raised the abstract sophistication of his work while paradoxically remaining grounded in the practical realities of making music.

One model was language. Schoenberg believed that music aimed at comprehensibility. Music employed devices at every level to create tension and restore stability so that the listener could receive the "idea" of a piece.

> Every tone which is added to a beginning tone makes the meaning of that tone doubtful. If, for instance, G follows after C, the ear may not be sure whether this expresses C major or G major, or even F major or E minor; and the addition of other tones may or may not clarify this problem. In this manner there is produced a state of unrest, of imbalance which grows throughout most of the piece, and is enforced further by similar functions of the rhythm. The method by which balance is restored seems to me the real idea of the composition. Perhaps the frequent repetitions of themes, groups, and even larger sections might be considered as attempts towards an early balance of the inherent tension.[90]

Schoenberg described this construction of meaning in music in an elaborate analogy to language. He wrote, "The technique of the connection of musical ideas is as manifold as the same technique in our language; one would, accordingly, best proceed along the line of grammatical principles." The composer aimed at "fluency" through finding "the right connective."[91] There were musical equivalents to "and" or "however" that generated a coherent flow between sections. Variation, for example, "delivers all that is grammatically necessary" to preserve the coherence of tonality and rhythm. "I define variation as changing a number of a unit's features, while preserving others." A variation

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[89]Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoön," 565.

[90]Arnold Schoenberg, "New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea (1946)," in Stein, *Style and Idea*, 123.

[91]Arnold Schoenberg, "Connection of Musical Ideas (c. 1948)," in Stein, *Style and Idea*, 287.

on an idea gets rid of certain obligations and creates new ones. "The preservation of features constantly secures logic, and upon the presence or absence of these connectives is based the greater or lesser degree of fluency."[92] So Schoenberg would analyze Bach's "Chaconne" in part by describing which features of the ostinato were retained by a given variation and which were eliminated. Schoenberg developed his own analytical vocabulary for describing a piece's comprehensibility. *Liquidation*, for instance, was his term for eliminating all the features of a section so that the piece can start anew, or adding and developing features so that it can transition to different goals.[93] In Bach's "Chaconne," Schoenberg might point out two moments of liquidation that divide the piece into minor and major sections, enabling the variations to take new directions.

Schoenberg's analogy between music and language was hardly unique. Yet it served to emphasize the feature of comprehensibility that he thought was crucial in the success of a work with listeners. (He planned a treatise on this topic, the notes toward which were published posthumously as *The Musical Idea*.)[94] A piece of music had to create common ground between the composer and the listener, so that the piece's idea could be received.

The second model that Schoenberg used to understand composition was his famous twelve-tone method, his final break from tonality. The diatonic scale, seven pitch-classes arranged hierarchically in relation to the tonic, or key, had governed Western music for centuries, along with the chord structure of triads that transformed the linear scale into vertical harmonies. Schoenberg's first exploration of atonality broke with the system of Western harmony, but did not supply a replacement for the scale as an organizing principle. Music from this period of "free atonality" was chromatic and

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[92]Schoenberg, "Connection of Musical Ideas," 287–88.

[93]Ibid., 288.

[94]Arnold Schoenberg, *The Musical Idea: And the Logic, Technique, and Art of Its Presentation*, trans. Patricia Carpenter and Severine Neff (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).

expressionistic. The twelve-tone method, by contrast, replaced the preordained diatonic organization of seven pitch-classes with a new arrangement of all twelve chromatic pitch-classes that was unique for each work. This arrangement was called a row. G-sharp no longer derived its significance from being, say, the leading-tone in A major or the tonic in G-sharp minor. In the absence of a key, the significance of G-sharp depended solely upon its position in a row.

Why would Schoenberg make this more structured break from tonality, when free atonality had already been revolutionary? The twelve-tone system was in fact demanded by Schoenberg's analogy with language. Schoenberg needed a tool for exerting control over his chromaticism.

> Form in the arts, and especially in music, aims primarily at comprehensibility. The relaxation which a satisfied listener experiences when he can follow an idea, its development, and the reasons for such development is closely related, psychologically speaking, to a feeling of beauty. Thus, artistic value demands comprehensibility, not only for intellectual, but also for emotional satisfaction. However, the creator's idea has to be presented, whatever the mood he is impelled to evoke. Composition with twelve tones has no other aim than comprehensibility.[95]

Modernists were rightly swept away by the implications of the twelve-tone system, yet they did not always understand why Schoenberg had made the innovation. Atonality needed form in order to build common ground with listeners. The common ground had to be emotional, not merely rational. The form he sought could be reinvented for each piece while at the same time exerting the needed controls through the twelve-tone row.

The twelve-tone system, then, was a response to the question, "How shall atonal music gain fluency?" To the extent that Schoenberg's music should be described as abstract, such a quality would come from his high level of thought about the nature of composition, not from the notes themselves. Further, the question itself compromised the of purity Greenberg had ascribed to music by refusing to accept the limitations of the

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[95]Arnold Schoenberg, "Composition with Twelve Tones (1) (1941)," in Stein, *Style and Idea*, 215.

medium of sound. Schoenberg knew that music was more than sound. The origin of the

twelve-tone system was also different from anything Hegel would have predicted.

Schoenberg's thinking had nothing to do with dialectical antitheses that contributed to the

development of human consciousness and freedom. Schoenberg was concerned with how

form might give fluency to sound in new ways that continued to develop the Western

tradition.

There is more to say, however, about the abstract nature of the twelve-tone

method. It was demanded by an analogy between composition and language. It was

created with another analogy: twelve-tone rows were like diatonic scales in that they

defined consonance and dissonance. The role of the diatonic scale was to place each

pitch-class in a hierarchy. Schoenberg saw his work as part of a century-long

development of chromaticism, in which the strong position of the root in a chord eroded

and chords functioned more freely in an "extended tonality."

> Very soon it became doubtful whether such a root still remained the centre to which
> every harmony and harmonic succession must be referred. Furthermore, it became
> doubtful whether a tonic appearing at the beginning, at the end, or at any other point
> really had a constructive meaning.

Richard Wagner and Claude Debussy used harmonies that "often served the colouristic

purpose of expressing moods and pictures," and the moods themselves became

constructive elements in works. This dethroning of the tonal center led to what

Schoenberg called "the emancipation of the dissonance."[96]

The phrase was one of his most famous expressions, in part because it

appealed to the revolutionary aspirations of the avant-garde, which never met an entity it

didn't want to emancipate. Schoenberg, typically, was more circumspect in using the

phrase than many of his advocates. To be sure, he defined "emancipation of the

dissonance" as equalizing the importance of dissonance and consonance in the logic of

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[96]Schoenberg, "Composition with Twelve Tones," 215.

harmony. But the phrase referred to the "comprehensibility" of dissonance: it was just as capable of expressing a musical idea with fluency as consonance.[97] This meant that Schoenberg's rigorous analogy with language went straight to work on the newly emancipated intervals, binding the dissonances to new rules. Dissonance had to stand or fall with listeners over time just like tonal music. If the composer with a twelve-tone row failed to construct a fluent piece, his dissonance would not be any particular advantage.

Schoenberg applied the same controls that gave tonal music fluency to twelve-tone music. In some cases, he rejected tools because they compromised the atonality. "By avoiding the establishment of a key modulation is excluded, since modulation means leaving an established tonality and establishing another tonality."[98] In other cases, the tools strengthened the atonality. For example, the craft of voice-leading ensured that tonal chords moved elegantly from one to the next without misplacing the emphasis by doubling the wrong note in the chord. In the same way that voice-leading strengthened tonal music, it also strengthened atonality. He avoided octave doublings (playing the same pitch-class in a higher or lower register): "To double is to emphasize, and an emphasized tone could be interpreted as a root, or even as a tonic," which could mislead a listener to hearing a tonal center, creating "false expectations of consequences and continuations."[99]

Radical as these concepts were, their dependency on analogies with language and with tonal music itself was noted and criticized by Pierre Boulez (1925-2016), among others. Aaron Copland, in explaining Schoenberg's system to the lay concert-goer, mentioned such critiques. Copland said that Schoenberg and Berg shared

a definite tonal nostalgia; [Schoenberg] also poured his new wine into the old

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[97]Schoenberg, "Composition with Twelve Tones," 217.

[98]Ibid.

[99]Ibid., 219.

bottles of the Classic forms—the rondo, the theme and variations, the minuet, and the gigue, to give but a few examples. Boulez accuses him of having been a kind of musical Kerensky, unable to carry through the full implications of the revolution he himself had instigated.

Boulez and others would radicalize the system even further with "total serialism," in which, as Copland explained, "not only are the pitches under control, as in Schoenberg, but non-pitch elements, such as the rhythm, dynamics, tone color, and kinds of attack, have all been serialized as well." Boulez said that the objective was to "annihilate the will of the composer."[100]

Thus, the purity of medium that Greenberg ascribed to music as a model for painting was a modernist mirage. First, Schoenberg, the most radical composer of the early twentieth century, was not seeking to create "pure" music, but consciously structured his method on abstract analogies. Second, the "impurity" of Schoenberg's approach was condemned by later revolutionaries like Boulez, and purified with greater "control"—which merely consisted of an extension of Schoenberg's abstract analogies. Third, the model of music that Greenberg and others held up for painting did not achieve purity for the visual medium either, but confused the issues of painting by a forced analogy with music composition. What modernists thought they saw in music—a pool of absolute abstraction—disappears the closer one gets, leaving nothing in their concepts but sand.

Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin

Greenberg was not the only dialectical materialist seeking to provide a theoretical basis for modernism. Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin went so far as to construct a rhetorical style that matched their approach to aesthetics. They advocated a complete dissociation of art from capitalism, driving the artist into a kind of personal abstraction from society—the move that Hegel regarded as suspect. Their rhetoric forced

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[100]Aaron Copland, *The New Music: 1900-1960*, rev. and enlarged ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 173–74.

the issue with readers at the most basic level of comprehension. Adorno and Benjamin did not write linear arguments that conformed to a supposedly totalizing rationalism. Instead they argued in particularities juxtaposed like stars in a constellation, in which the argument rested not on the cumulative logic of individual inferences, but on the pattern taken as a whole. Terry Eagleton, writing in the 1990s from a Marxist perspective, said, "The concept of constellation, which Benjamin elaborated in close collaboration with Adorno, is perhaps the most strikingly original attempt in the modern period to break with traditional versions of totality." This revolutionary rhetoric "strikes at the very heart of the traditional aesthetic paradigm, in which the specificity of the detail is allowed no genuine resistance to the organizing power of the totality."[101] They embedded the revolution against capitalism in paragraphs, abstracting their use of language from logic itself.

In 1940, Walter Benjamin hid a bundle of manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale when he fled Paris. The bundle contained notes and essays that he had compiled intermittently in 1928-29, 1934, and 1940 about the arcade galleries of Paris and nineteenth century culture.[102] This unfinished material was later published as *The Arcades Project*,[103] showing Benjamin as a collector of quotations, impressions, and ephemera from the period. Rolf Tiedemann says, "Benjamin devised his dialectic at a standstill in order to make such traces visible, to collect the 'trash of history,' and to 'redeem' them for its end."[104] About these notes, the translators of the English edition say, "What Benjamin seems to have conceived was a dialectical relation—a formal and

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[101]Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990), 330.

[102]Rolf Tiedemann, "Dialectics at a Standstill: Approaches to the Passagen-Werk," in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Gary Smith and Andre Lefevere (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 930.

[103]Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

[104]Tiedemann, "Dialectics at a Standstill," 945.

thematic interfusion of citation and commentary."[105] The reader was to put all the material together into a pattern, understanding the bourgeois culture of the nineteenth century from the bits of concrete detail it left behind.

One a single page of these notes, for example, Benjamin gives the reader a kind of thesis about French caricaturist J. J. Grandville (1803-1847), which is then exemplified in pointillistic details from other sources. "Grandville's works," he wrote, "are the sibylline books of *publicité*. Everything that, with him, has its preliminary form as joke, or satire, attains its true unfolding as advertisement." Without comment, Benjamin quotes a handbill from the 1830s, in which a Parisian textiles dealer urgently desires to "contribute to your eternal salvation" by directing Parisians' "attention to the study of the Holy Scriptures," as well has to his own "extremely moderate prices" for hosiery. Then Benjamin quotes a description of a life-sized oil painting of a French general in full dress uniform "holding out a bare foot" for treatment by a podiatrist.[106] Even if Benjamin's intention were to add more commentary to connect these points, the effect would still have been to lead the reader through a pattern including Grandville's caricatures and advertising for podiatrists, a pattern showing the emptiness of bourgeois culture. Benjamin wrote of such bits of detail, "They are residues of a dream world. The realization of dream elements, in the course of waking up, is the paradigm of dialectical thinking. Thus, dialectical thinking is the organ of historical awakening." The frozen detritus of the nineteenth century was a way to "recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled."[107] Benjamin's thesis and his style worked together: the readers confronted by his patterns had to step away from bourgeois society and see it from outside, the same way Benjamin did.

[105]Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, xiii.

[106]Ibid., 172.

[107]Ibid., 13.

Theodor Adorno was the first person to sift through Benjamin's manuscript after it was retrieved in 1947.[108] He had worked with Benjamin for years before Benjamin committed suicide in 1940, and the two had developed the constellation method of discourse in common. But Adorno developed the style to a more complex, allusive, and aggressive level.

Writing with Max Horkheimer, Adorno portrayed the culture industry as a monolithic and deceptive machine that assimilated all art into capitalist propaganda. This passage is an example of constellation rhetoric:

> The culture industry is corrupt; not because it is a sinful Babylon but because it is a cathedral dedicated to elevated pleasure. On all levels, from Hemingway to Emil Ludwig, from Mrs. Miniver to the Lone Ranger, from Toscanini to Guy Lombardo, there is untruth in the intellectual content taken ready-made from art and science. The culture industry does retain a trace of something better in those features which bring it close to the circus, in the self-justifying and nonsensical skill of riders, acrobats and clowns, in the "defense and justification of physical as against intellectual art." But the refugees of a mindless artistry which represents what is human as opposed to the social mechanism are being relentlessly hunted down by a schematic reason which compels everything to prove its significance and effect. The consequence is that the nonsensical at the bottom disappears as utterly as the sense in works of art at the top.[109]

One labors to make sense of the passage. Its thesis ("The culture industry is corrupt") is advanced by allusive and metaphorical assertions layered on top of each other so that the cumulative impression substitutes for logical validity. The passage has allusions to Babylon, writers, films, musicians, and the quotation of a single unattributed phrase, interspersed with metaphors like a cathedral, a circus, and refugees. The culture industry's corruption is not that it draws people into sin (a Babylon), but that it pretends to deliver "elevated pleasure" (like a cathedral). The elevated pleasures exist on a spectrum from pretentious highs (Hemingway, Mrs. Miniver, and Toscanini) to patronizing lows (Emil Ludwig, the Lone Ranger, and Guy Lombardo). The whole range

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[108]Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, xiv.

[109]Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1999), 143.

serves up "untruth in the intellectual content taken ready-made from art and science." A trace of real art remains at the circus, but even that is made false by the nonsense of the show. Any "refugees" from the culture industry are being "hunted down" by the system, which covers up what is "nonsensical" both the top and the bottom of the range. The demand that every element prove its significance to the system's logic is the mechanism for the cover-up.

Two theoretical enormities shine out from the constellation, their full significance shrouded in the dark. The reader can spot them if he or she is a modernist insider. One is the term *ready-made*. In Adorno, this was a dialectical code phrase, referring to art that was not made as an antithesis abstracted from culture—the only valid art—but rather adapted collaboratively from cultural materials—or kitsch, the vast heap of illegitimate work. (This term should not be confused with Marcel Duchamp's "readymades" like "Bicycle Wheel," which were part of a different stream of art.) The other is the quoted fragment, which came from playwright Frank Wedekind (1864-1918),[110] referring to "physical as against intellectual art." In Adorno's frame of reference, "physical" art would be work that merely speaks to the senses without addressing the mind, the view that goes back to Schiller's "magic circle." These two theoretical concepts—undeveloped, unsupported, merely asserted in passing by allusion—are in the constellation to alert the reader that serious thinkers would agree with the characterization of the "culture industry" as corrupt. Anyone who needed a tutorial on the abomination of "ready-made" art, or who had not yet taken in enough Wedekind to appreciate how apt the quotation was, was on notice that he or she had missed something important.

A passage like this one was an antithesis against bourgeois culture, forcing the reader to choose a side. If he or she nodded in knowing agreement while recognizing the

[110]Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, 143n.

pattern Adorno and Horkheimer had created, then the reader was identifying with the authors. But if he or she insisted on questioning the passage, then the reader was siding with the bourgeois thesis and rejecting the avant-garde antithesis. Maybe the reader asked whether Adorno was calling Hemingway and Toscanini fakes. Maybe the reader wondered what the distinction really was between true art and kitsch. These questions would merely have triggered another constellation, another paragraph sketching an intellectual pattern. More deeply, to raise such questions at all was to participate in the culture industry's cover-up, in which the totalizing logic demands that every detail justify itself in the system. The previous chapter showed Adorno making asides that appropriated Bach's legacy into his own ideology. His habit was not mere sloppiness or pomposity. Adorno refused to justify his constellations as a matter of principle. Another word for this kind of technique might be bullying—though that ugly term sounds less brilliant than the strategy was meant to appear.

Adorno not only wrote in this manner, but believed that Schoenberg composed the same way, and for the same reasons. All modern music was to follow the radical principle of antithesis. A work posed an antithesis to culture by disavowing traditional logic and following its own internal laws. Adorno demanded the removal of the composer and the work from society, a structural abstraction that went far beyond the content of the music. Modern music should force the listener to choose sides in the revolution.

For example, the principle went to the level of harmony. Adorno said of triads, chords based on the diatonic scale, "It is not simply that these sounds are antiquated and untimely, but that they are false."[111] The dialectic of history had invalidated triads. Musical works had to justify themselves by their own autonomous logic. Their truth or falsehood "will be evident only in the specific configurations of the compositional tasks.

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[111]Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster, Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers (New York: Continuum, 2003), 34.

No chord is false 'in itself,' simply because there is no such thing as a chord in itself and because each chord is a vehicle of the total context—indeed, for the total direction." The composer was no longer a creator, but rather an executor of the structure of his composition, answering questions posed to him by the total state of technique in relation to his composition—that is, from the same point of view Adorno used to interpret Bach and his legacy. "The compositions themselves are nothing but such answers—nothing but the solution of technical picture puzzles—and the composer is the only one who is capable of reading his compositions and understanding his own music."[112] Adorno's principle isolated a composition from audiences at the level of comprehension itself.

How did Adorno believe this principle operated in modern music? How did "internal laws" govern a work?

He saw Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique as the tool for achieving the antithesis history demanded. The twelve-tone row divorced a work from any connection with the music that came before, while at the same exerting, Adorno thought, total control over the work internally.

The twelve-tone row restored counterpoint—the equal, voice-against-voice writing that characterized Renaissance and Baroque polyphony—to the primary place Adorno thought it deserved. The row was not shackled by the diatonic scale and its triads, so its polyphony was free to create non-tonal harmony. At the same time, the row put strict limits on atonal expression. Instead of the voices in a piece having to conform to triads, they were determined by the relationships between pitch-classes in the row. By using counterpoint in this way, Schoenberg was able to suspend "that foundational contrast upon which all Western music is built—the contrast between polyphonic fugal structure and homophonic sonata-form," or melody with a subordinated accompaniment. By this means Schoenberg escaped the "regressive" counterpoint with which

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[112]Adorno, *Philosophy*, 35.

Romanticism decorated otherwise homophonic compositions.[113] Adorno believed that the row both liberated works from culture and controlled works autonomously, achieving the kind of formal purity that Greenberg saw in visual abstraction.

The row's control over voices in a work was quite specific for Adorno. In tonal music, intervals between pitches have clear expressive significance across many individual works. The twelve-tone row broke that continuity. "The true quality of a melody is always to be measured by whether or not it succeeds in transforming the spatial relations of intervals into time. Twelve-tone technique destroys this relationship at its very roots." The intervals in one work are absolutely unique to that work. All pitches are equalized, no longer subordinated to a tonal center. Adorno reiterated the point: "At one time, all musical meaning was unequivocally determined by intervals . . . . Now intervals have become nothing more than building stones, and all experiences which are encompassed in their differentiation are seemingly lost." Since all intervallic relationships are determined by the row and no new ones can be introduced, melodic development is impossible. Melody can only progress through a series of "established and characteristic rhythmic figures," with "variation-like effects," all under the strict and autonomous law of the row.[114]

For Adorno, the listener is entirely excluded from consideration by the composer. As with Adorno's prose, the listener to modern music has to choose sides, either standing with the revolution or remaining on the wrong side of history. The logic of composition itself was to be removed from the experience and emotional world of audiences, to the extent that only the composer would be able to understand it. One can readily understand why Schoenberg himself took a dim view of Adorno's philosophy. Schoenberg said, after all, "Composition with twelve tones has no other aim than

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[113]Adorno, *Philosophy*, 52–54.

[114]Ibid., 74–76.

comprehensibility."[115]

Abstraction in Langer and Arnheim

Views of abstraction that had been unusual when Hazlitt was writing his "Lectures on English Philosophy" came to somewhat greater prominence in the twentieth century. Like Hazlitt, but from entirely different presuppositions, Susanne Langer said that an abstract classification of sense impressions was where human cognition began, not where it culminated. She also argued that abstraction in art played a crucial role beyond the expression of feeling—in reasoning itself.

Langer first argued in *Philosophy in a New Key* that the refusal of naturalistic philosophers to take symbols seriously had deprived them of an evolutionary understanding of much human behavior. In her later work, she developed her critique into a more comprehensive philosophy of human cognition.

Her arresting proposal was to "make feeling the starting-point of a philosophy of mind."[116] Even though Langer worked within a naturalistic framework, in which all phenomena had materialistic explanations, she said the framework had problems accounting for "introspective data, fantasies, dreams and alleged memories which cannot be empirically checked." Subjective realities were inseparable from the work of psychologists, psychiatrists, and therapists, yet did not fit the apparatus of the hard sciences.[117] She summed up her point this way:

> Builders may know the basics of mechanics, cooks find out chemical properties, and sailors map the sky; but who has any such naïve yet expert knowledge of psychical phenomena? Who knows the essentials of feeling? The real patterns of feeling— how a small fright, or "startle," terminates, how the tensions of boredom increase or give way to self-entertainment, how daydreaming weaves in and out of realistic thought, how the feeling of a place, a time of day, an ordinary situation is built up—

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[115]Schoenberg, "Twelve Tones," 215.

[116]Susanne K. Langer, *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, ed. Gary Van Den Heuvel, abridged ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 14.

[117]Ibid., 6.

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these felt events, which compose the fabric of mental life, usually pass unobserved, unrecorded and therefore essentially unknown to the average person.[118]

How might philosophers begin to account for feeling? Langer pointed to symbols as a gateway: if philosophers could understand how the mind formed and reasoned about symbols, then they could find some structure for subjective events. The formation of symbols began with what Langer called images—not just visual material in the mind, "but often gestic, kinesthetic, verbal or what I can only call 'situational.'" She said that "we apprehend everything which comes to us as impact from the world by imposing some image on it that stresses its salient features and shapes it for recognition and memory." A mental image comes to symbolize an object, state, or event in the world because it "abstracts [the object's] phenomenal character, its immediate effect on our sensibility or the way it presents itself as something of importance, magnitude, strength or fragility, permanence or transience, etc. It organizes and enhances the impression directly received." Further, images of all kinds can "fit more than one actual experience." Images and their symbolic value thus become part of all our intellectual processes.[119] Langer went even further. She said that our best identification with introspective activity "is through images that hold and present them for our contemplation; and their images are works of art."[120]

Art is the way human beings externalize images for contemplation. Artists see in the world "an inexhaustible wealth of tensions, rhythms, continuities and contrasts which can be rendered in line and color; and those are the 'internal forms' which the 'external forms'—paintings, musical or poetic compositions or any other works of art—express for us." The resulting artworks are single symbols whose parts take "their expressive character from their functions in the perceptual whole." Langer defined art as

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[118]Langer, *Mind*, 24.

[119]Ibid., 26.

[120]Ibid., 29.

"the objectification of feeling; and in developing our intuition, teaching eye and ear to perceive expressive form, it makes form expressive for us wherever we confront it, in actuality as well as in art."[121] The power of images, and in particular of artworks, to abstract meaning and become symbolic placed the issue of abstraction at the core of Langer's thinking.

How does an artistic process of abstraction work? Langer said that an artist does not want to recreate "a yellow chair, a hay wain or a morally perplexed prince, as 'a symbol of his emotion,'" but rather wants to project "the emotional 'value' that events, situations, sounds or sights in their passing have had for him." He might use techniques he has seen in older works. He might start with a "concrete symbol," a "sober fact," or a felicitous phrase, any stimulus that recalls "vividly a feeling the artist has once known that imposed itself on things about him like a special light, and gave them the quality he wants to impart to the image he is making." This kind of work is "the abstractive process of art." It is not abstract thought, as if it were discursive, but is "abstractive," drawing out the phenomena of feelings stored in things.[122] Langer insisted that this process is "an intellectual function." But it is a function in which a complex relational pattern "can be understood directly, without discursive analysis and technical process of reasoning." The process of artistic abstraction works through the sort intellectual perception that bypasses chains of inferences.[123]

Since symbols were so central to Langer's concept of the mind, she sought to analyze artistic abstraction in detail. "The problems of abstraction in art have never been philosophically surveyed and analyzed." Most often, she said, the problems were resolved "piecemeal" in the practical working of individual artists, who might either

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[121]Langer, *Mind*, 40.

[122]Ibid., 53–54.

[123]Ibid., 62.

decry abstraction as an artistic concept or defend it. "In the first case, of course, they mean the kind of abstraction made in literal discourse, in the second some sort of non-discursive appeal to intuition." Langer was interested in the structure of the second sort, not in what she called "generalizing abstraction," in which scientists started with data points and drew broader conclusions from them.[124] "Pointing out that [artistic abstractions] are not based on generalization and are not carried on by discursive thought tells us only what they are not, but provides no notion of what they are."[125] Langer called them "presentational abstractions"—the relationship of many symbols that create a new symbolic whole.[126]

One form of presentational abstraction is tension, or opposing elements within an artwork. "By their very occurrence they immediately engender a structure." They are introduced by the "first element" to appear in the work, whether "line, gesture or tone." In performed works, like Martha Graham's *Primitive Mysteries*, the rise of the curtain "on black darkness" is the element that gives "the whole tensive frame of the piece." In the plastic arts, tension may arise from "any operation on the blank ground, for instance, the introduction of a line or a spot, or spots, of color." In music, tension "is most obvious in the resolution or withholding of resolution of dissonant chords."[127]

Another form of abstraction, Langer said, could be found in traditional representation—the copying or imitating of natural forms. When an artist sees a compelling form in a mountain, her "automatic abstractive seeing" removes the mountain from its natural setting and places it in a new context that emphasizes the form. When a composer hears a bird call, his "automatic abstractive hearing" removes it from the

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[124]Langer, *Mind*, 68.

[125]Ibid., 69.

[126]Ibid., 70.

[127]Ibid., 71.

countryside and places it in a musical work. "This principle of automatically abstractive seeing and hearing deeply affects the potentialities of art; for it provides another and quite different means of constructing forms, whereby tensions, always created in the process, are subordinated to the unity of a substantive element." Langer said:

> Far from being a non-artistic competing interest, [representation] is an orienting, unifying, motivating force wherever it occurs at all in the early stages of an art; it is the normal means of "isolating abstraction," or abstraction by suppressing or cancelling all obscuring factors in order to emphasize the intended form. It provides terms in which a visual structure may be seen at once as a whole, and its parts as articulations of the whole.[128]

In other instances, an object in nature might suggest the representation of an entirely different form. Langer cited a Paleolithic sculpture of a horse's head that had been suggested by a protrusion of rock in a cavern. "In the realm of plastic art, quite apart from symbolic intent, the intuitive seeing of one thing in another is an invaluable means of abstracting not only shapes, but nameless characteristics."[129]

In Langer's examination of the mind, feeling, and art, abstraction was an intuitive starting-point, a structure for understanding and communicating experiences. Like Hazlitt, she believed that sense impressions, far from being prior to abstraction, could not be understood at all without abstraction. Artworks of all styles were a repository of symbols that made subjective images intelligible. Presentational abstraction uses symbols to "make the logical projection of feeling as the quality of a perceptible object."[130] Art is "an image of human experience," organizing sensations according to "the gestalt principle."[131] Her approach to art has become a reference point for thinkers writing about the significance of music,[132] the nature of aesthetic expression,[133] tools of

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[128]Langer, *Mind*, 72–73.

[129]Ibid., 73.

[130]Susanne K. Langer, "Abstraction in Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 22, no. 4 (July 1, 1964): 380–81.

[131]Ibid., 382.

[132]David Carr, "Music, Meaning, and Emotion," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*

analysis in art criticism,[134] and even non-Western approaches to aesthetic theory.[135]

As the term *gestalt* implied, her conceptions were founded as much on the findings of psychology as philosophy. Langer cited several psychologists who were studying the artistic process, such as Klaus Conrad, Oswald Kroh, Friedrich Sander, and Heinrich Werner.[136] Another psychologist who was engaged in these issues of cognition was Rudolph Arnheim.

A prominent formalist in film theory,[137] Arnheim wrote widely about the psychology of art. He questioned whether the mind really had a division of labor between perceiving and thinking, between gathering information through the senses and processing that information through the intellect. He argued that "the collaboration of perceiving and thinking in cognition would be incomprehensible if such a division existed." In fact, he said "that only because perception gathers types of things, that is, concepts, can perceptual material be used for thought; and inversely, that unless the stuff of the senses remains present the mind has nothing to think with."[138] The same misleading division of labor confused other issues, as "in the practice of distinguishing 'abstract' from 'concrete' things as though they belonged to two mutually exclusive sets; that is, as though an abstract thing could not be concrete at the same time, and vice versa."[139] Arnheim, further yet, said that anything the mind experiences "can acquire

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62, no. 3 (2004): 225–34.

[133]John Spackman, "Expressiveness, Ineffability, and Nonconceptuality," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70, no. 3 (2012): 303–14.

[134]Lawrence D. Steefel, "'Contextual Relativism': A Procedure for Modern Critics," *Art Journal* 21, no. 3 (1962): 151–55.

[135]Jane Cauvel, "The Transformative Power of Art: Li Zehou's Aesthetic Theory," *Philosophy East and West* 49, no. 2 (1999): 150–73.

[136]Langer, "Abstraction in Art," 385–86.

[137]Elsaesser and Hagener, *Film Theory*, 3.

[138]Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, 1.

[139]Ibid., 154–55.

abstractness if it is seen as a distillate of something more complex." He called such a phenomenon "an abstraction when it serves as a picture."[140]

Arnheim knew of Langer's work. He approved of her concept of "automatically abstractive seeing and hearing." He only objected that she didn't carry the idea far enough, believing that she limited "presentational abstraction" to art. (He seemed only to be referring to an article she published in 1964, not her comprehensive development of the argument in *Mind*, which extended the principle far beyond art alone.)[141]

Langer and Arnheim, while apparently unaware of Hazlitt's argument, and working from quite different presuppositions, nevertheless arrived at conclusions that were almost identical. The human intellect begins with abstractions, moving from concepts to individuation. The notion of abstraction as the summit of human thought, a kind of gateway to transcendence, was incoherent.

Conclusions

When Hubert Damisch addressed the problem of abstraction in the visual arts in 2009, he commented that the contemporary art scene was bent on "ridding itself of the idea of abstraction by refusing it all currency and reducing it to the level of a curio, the so-called 'abstract' art."[142] Yet the issue could not be ignored, having been surrounded by controversy all the way back to Worringer.[143] Damisch summarized the received wisdom on abstraction: it had moved from being a "goal" for Kandinsky and a "stage" in art's progress for Mondrian to being one genre among many today.[144] Then he summoned the

[140]Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, 156.

[141]Ibid., 161–62.

[142]Hubert Damisch, "Remarks on Abstraction," *October* 127 (January 1, 2009): 133.

[143]Ibid., 134–35.

[144]Ibid., 135.

example of Henri Matisse (1869-1954), that hard-to-label painter who engaged with abstraction yet refused to use the term. Damisch expounded how Matisse sought not to copy the tree outside his window, but to find the "sign" of the tree with all its subjective relationships inside his own mind.[145] In drawings and letters, Matisse documented a process of mixing concrete detail with more abstract elements in his images. For Damisch, Matisse's example went to the core of what the art world needed to grapple with again. Abstraction is woven into all art.

> Can we speak as the historical avant-gardes did, pretending to ignore the fact that abstraction, in all its guises, has always been, and is still, at work—less manifest, to be sure, but no less active and constantly renewed, not only in the domain of art, but in countless human activities, from the most commonplace to the most sophisticated?[146]

This chapter's survey supports several conclusions.

First, modernist accounts of abstraction were confused and even tendentious ideological constructs. Artists and theorists created one untenable concept after another, whether it was the opposition of representation and abstraction, or the search for purity on a two-dimensional plane, or the purging of "literary" elements from paintings based on an analogy with music, or a demand that a composition be intelligible only to its composer. Modernists were keen to provide universal proclamations about the duties of artists, but were not so articulate about what those duties entailed, or even what modernist artists were actually doing.

Second, the idealist philosophies that formed much of the structure for modernism created an artistic mandate that could never have been fulfilled. The concepts of beauty and freedom that were so essential to Schiller and Hegel were disposed of by modernists, who accepted the call to change the character of society, but regarded beauty and freedom as bourgeois delusions. The rational optimism of the idealists was too

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[145]Damisch, "Remarks," 136–44.

[146]Ibid., 140.

dependent on the culture and temper of their times.

Third, the combination of an unworkable account of artistic integrity and a despairing account of audiences institutionalized the split between audiences and artists. Even after modernism has waned, the art world seems to pursue ever more conceptual schemes, worrying about the ignorant masses who do not appreciate having their consciousness raised, while the rest of the world needs solidarity.

Fourth, there was a minority report on abstraction delivered over the last two centuries by Hazlitt and Langer, *et al*. Their presuppositions did not necessarily cohere, and their views may raise new problems, both philosophical and artistic. Still, if the implications of their views on abstraction can be worked out and applied, then a new formulation of artistic integrity is entirely within reach, and a new relationship between artists and audiences along with it. Abstraction is not an absolute quality, but a relative one. There is a range of abstraction that depends on the distance between a concept and a specific referent. Artists dwell in the reflective space that abstraction opens, and they invite audiences to visit that space. When an audience engages a work of art—at whatever levels of abstraction the work was conceived, and at whatever levels of abstraction the audience needs or desires—the audience will find its perception and thinking sharpened. They will be able to talk about intuitions, experiences, memories, values, and connections that they couldn't talk about before, simply because they have an object from an artist that they can share.

Emily, as she draws triangles and practices "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," may already understand this dynamic quite well. Her tutors, in all of their labors to raise her level of abstract thinking, may have forgotten how basic and important Emily's existing abstractions already are.

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CHAPTER 4

J. S. BACH AND CREATION

The continental idealism of Friedrich Schiller and G. W. F. Hegel saw human need in terms of a dichotomy between duty imposed by reason and vitality driven by sense experience. Human beings were torn between the two, never able to achieve the transcendence offered by reason because of the appetites of daily existence. The potential for human beings was to achieve transcendence corporately, through the rationally ordered state. Perfected human nature could rise above its sensual corruption if only personal appetites could be subdued.

While political revolutions had failed to realize this potential, there was another way. The character of states could change if the character of their citizens changed. There was a way that sense experience could be reconciled to rational duty through freedom, in which the human will was released from its slavery to appetite by a vision of beauty. The key to changing the human character was the fine arts—an aesthetic education.

While modernists continued to believe that art was the way to change humanity, they utterly rejected rationalist optimism about freedom. Romantic notions of a liberated will were delusional. What the bourgeois masses really needed was to become conscious of their enslavement, of the absurdity of their culture, and of the need for radical change. Any solidarity between an artist and his audience would soothe the bourgeoisie back into accepting lies. Only alienation would shock them to life again.

Such were the presuppositions that drove audiences and artists apart in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In order to understand a different model for an artist's role in meeting human needs, one that might bring a reconciliation with audiences, it is

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important to consider different presuppositions. What other assumptions might artists make about human need and potential? How might those assumptions inform another account of artistic integrity?

J. S. Bach's "Chaconne" for solo violin can provide such a reconciling model. The presuppositions that shaped Bach's view of artistry were formed by the Protestant Reformation. What had the Reformation's legacy become in the early eighteenth century institutionally, philosophically, and theologically? How did the heirs of the Reformation see the world in matters of science, beauty, institutions, and art? To answer these questions, this chapter will compare Bach (1685-1750) with his American contemporary, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). In the midst of cultural, geopolitical, and theological turmoil, these two men built lasting intellectual and spiritual legacies.

Their theological differences will illuminate as much of Bach's thinking as their similarities. Bach's Lutheranism and Edwards's Calvinism did have a great deal in common. Both traditions were magisterial, that is, founded on the alliance between church and state. Both baptized infants. They also shared a strong doctrine of predestination. Their public worship, however, differed on two key points. Lutheranism taught the "real presence" of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, while Calvinism rejected that doctrine. Further, Calvinists held to the "regulative principle," which stated that public worship could only use elements expressly taught in Scripture, condemning many practices of Lutherans and Roman Catholics together as human additions that polluted worship. Thus, the role of music in worship was starkly limited to congregational singing for Edwards, calling into question Bach's whole vocation as a composer of sacred music. Lutherans and Calvinists could not worship together if they could not agree on such central issues as baptism, the Eucharist, and music. The competition between Lutheranism and Calvinism was particularly heated in Germany itself, and would shape the context of Bach's work in Cöthen, the city where he completed the "Chaconne."

Comparison of Bach with Edwards

Bach and Edwards were separated by language, vocation, tradition, and the Atlantic Ocean. They never met, and they were not aware of each other. Edwards was a colonial frontiersman who lived on the edge of the New World with a clear sense of English identity. Bach lived at the center of the Old World, moving from one principality to another, an heir of German culture before there was a German nation. Edwards was a leading pastor, theologian, and philosopher. Bach was a leading musician, not only in performance and composition but also in technology. The two were on opposite sides of a deep Protestant split: Edwards was a Calvinist while Bach was a Lutheran.

Regardless of their isolation from each other, Edwards and Bach shared a metaphysic of the origin, purpose, and teleology of the created order. Both men's concepts of creation were central to their work, not merely inherited dogmas. Edwards wrote extensively about the connections between creation and redemption as biblical themes, using his arguments both to attack philosophical materialism and to teach Christian spirituality. Bach regarded music as a physical participation in God's design for the deep structure of the cosmos, a participation that called for rational questioning and mastery. While such concepts were broadly shared in the Newtonian era, their intensive focus on the created order was unusual, generating a coherence in their respective bodies of work that still commands respect today.

The rationale for comparing Bach and Edwards becomes clear after inspecting their lives and work more closely. Their biographies invite comparison because of the breadth and depth of their vocational mastery, and because of their monumental legacies. Even further, elements of their thinking reveal a generous overlap of concerns.

Consider their biographical parallels. Both Edwards and Bach were at the top of their fields and enjoyed international reputations. Edwards was the foremost American pastor of his day, just as Bach was Germany's most virtuosic performer and technician on the keyboard and its most intellectually formidable composer. In their fields, both

Edwards and Bach became the summative figures of their traditions. Edwards formulated Calvinist theology for the modern era, and helped lead the First Great Awakening, one of the formative events in colonial culture. Bach gathered the threads of European musical development and wove them together in a compositional system that transcended style. He remains the principal reference point for Western music. Both men had devoted followers who advocated their approaches posthumously.

   Three of their overlapping priorities deserve our attention, placing in sharp relief the two men's understanding of human need and potential. Bach and Edwards shared a concern for beauty. They also believed that the most basic human need is an individual change of heart toward God. Furthermore, they shared a commitment to reason—causing both men to have troubled relationships with the Pietist movements in their two traditions.

   Beauty, for Bach and Edwards, was a central quality of Jesus Christ and a decisive factor in the human response to God. They saw humanity's sin as the expression of hostility, an alienation from God that twists good into unrecognizable ugliness. Human beings only become virtuous when they respond to Christ's beauty with the adoration and love he deserves. God's grace empowers this change by forming an apprehension of his beauty in the human heart. George Marsden remarks on this shared theme: "Though Bach was Lutheran and German, he and Edwards were working in similar worlds of discourse where ineffable beauties that pointed to the divine were found in the harmonies of complex relationships."[1]

   Edwards expressed a strong aesthetic response to God from his earliest writings. His youthful "Diary" showed a preoccupation with his emotional life in response to the world around him. He asked, for example, "whether any delight, or

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[1] George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 79.

satisfaction, ought to be allowed, because any other end is obtained, besides a religious one?"[2] (He answers *yes*.) Much later, his "Personal Narrative" featured many passages like this one describing his early spiritual practices:

> God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature; which used greatly to fix my mind. I often used to sit and view the moon, for a long time; and so in the daytime, spent much time in viewing the clouds and sky, to behold the sweet glory of God in these things: in the meantime, singing forth with a low voice, my contemplations of the Creator and Redeemer. And scarce anything, among all the works of nature, was so sweet to me as thunder and lightning. Formerly, nothing had been so terrible to me. I used to be a person uncommonly terrified with thunder: and it used to strike me with terror, when I saw a thunderstorm rising. But now, on the contrary, it rejoiced me. I felt God at the first appearance of a thunderstorm. And used to take the opportunity at such times, to fix myself to view the clouds, and see the lightnings play, and hear the majestic and awful voice of God's thunder: which often times was exceeding entertaining, leading me to sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God. And while I viewed, used to spend my time, as it always seemed natural to me, to sing or chant forth my meditations; to speak my thoughts in soliloquies, and speak with a singing voice.[3]

This passage reveals many characteristics of Edwards's spirituality: the whole created order expressing God's glory, his practice of meditating in nature, and his freedom to sing apparently improvisatory songs in response to God. Elsewhere, Edwards says more succinctly, "Those words (*Song of Solomon 2:1*) used to be abundantly with me: 'I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys.' The words seemed to me, sweetly to represent, the loveliness and beauty of Jesus Christ."[4] Edwards placed the conversion of the soul to the beauty of Christ at the center of piety in *Religious Affections*,[5] God's purpose for creation,[6] and the nature of virtue.[7] One might argue that Edwards was the most

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[2]Jonathan Edwards, "Diary," in *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 16 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 763.

[3]Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in Claghorn, *Letters and Personal Writings*, 794.

[4]Ibid., 16:793.

[5]Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

[6]Jonathan Edwards, "Concerning the End for Which God Created the World," in *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 403–536.

aesthetically oriented theologian of the modern era.

Bach's emphasis on beauty might seem clear enough from his vocation. He descended from a line of Lutheran musicians who saw themselves as craftsmen devoted to beautiful sound. In his inherited way of life, this craftsmanship meant not merely learning an instrument and playing it well, but playing many instruments, maintaining them, singing, directing other musicians, and composing—all to the highest standards. This way of life meant marrying and raising musicians, which many families did in Bach's time.

What raises the importance of Bach's view of beauty is his unusual level of theological interest. As a church musician, he was trained theologically, just as Lutheran pastors were trained musically. Before he became cantor in Leipzig in 1723, he had to pass examinations by two theologians on the Formula of Concord, one positively affirming all the specific points in the formula, the other denying specific non-Lutheran beliefs.[8] Bach also worked extensively with pastors and theologians to craft the lyrics of cantatas he composed for public worship. Words like the opening of *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* (BWV 1) are typical in ascribing beauty to Christ: "How lovely [*schön*] shines the Morning Star,/ Full of grace and truth from the Lord,/ the sweet root of Jesse!" Christ has "taken possession of my heart."[9] So much was part of the job of any church musician. But Bach's interest in theology went far beyond this. Christoph Wolff documents that Bach's theological library was unusually large, and would have served any Lutheran pastor well, filled with many multi-volume works from Luther himself and from other scholars within the tradition. Wolff comments on a receipt from a book auction that survives:

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[7]Jonathan Edwards, "The Nature of True Virtue," in Ramsey, *Ethical Writings*, 537–628.

[8]Robin A. Leaver, "Music and Lutheranism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, ed. John Butt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 37.

[9]Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach: With Their Librettos in German-English Parallel Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 666.

Although an isolated document, this receipt suggests that Bach may have gone about developing his library in a particularly systematic manner, that he was interested in the provenance of his acquisition, that he was willing to pay as much as a tenth of his fixed annual salary at a book auction, and most important, that he saw himself, if only privately, as a biblical interpreter in the succession and company of these eminent theological scholars. But for Bach, theological and musical scholarship were two sides of the same coin: the search for divine revelation, or the quest for God.[10]

Bach's unusual characteristic was the degree to which he seems to have developed a theological rationale for making beautiful sounds. Just as Edwards is one of the most aesthetically oriented theologians, Bach is one of the most theologically oriented composers.

The only theological work Bach owned that comes down us is the 1681 edition of the Lutheran Bible in three volumes with extensive commentaries by Abraham Calov. It came to light in the late twentieth century, refuting assertions from some scholars that Bach's piety was merely cultural. With its heavy underlining and marginalia in Bach's hand, it shows his deep interaction with Scripture.[11] One annotation in particular has attracted scholarly notice. At 2 Chronicles 5:13, where the cloud descends on Solomon's temple when the Levites begin to play, Bach wrote, "When there is a devotional music, God with his grace is always present."[12] Behind Bach's performance and composition of music stood a powerful intellect that probed theological issues. His focus on beauty in the Christian life went beyond the fulfillment of his vocation.

Beauty is related to the second overlap in Edwards's and Bach's thought. Though they were in different theological camps, they both emphasized that true religion came from a change of heart toward God. For Edwards and Bach, religious exercise that was merely external, habitual, or cultural was anathema. The only human response

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[10]Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 335.

[11]Leaver, "Music and Lutheranism," 39; Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 334.

[12]John Butt, "Bach's Metaphysics of Music," in Butt, *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, 54–55; Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 339.

acceptable to God was faith animated by personal affection for Christ, and this response could only come from a dependence on God's grace. Both men calibrated their work to stir the hearts of their listeners, using the power of beauty to gain the depth of response they believed God deserved.

Edwards's emphasis on a change of affections in response to God's beauty has been summarized above. Still, it is worth observing the strength and specificity of his statements on this issue. The first part of the *Religious Affections* (published in 1746) argued at length that the Bible calls for this change of heart and that God will accept nothing else. He concludes the section: "So has God disposed things . . . as to have the greatest, possible tendency to reach our hearts in the most tender part, and move our affections most sensibly and strongly. How great cause have we therefore to be humbled to the dust, that we are no more affected!"[13] He was specific about what he included in the affections. They did not come from physical senses or the human body, but from the mind. By contrast, the passions had violent effects on "the animal spirits" and left the mind "more overpowered, and less in its own command."[14] In this sense, Edwards would have agreed with Schiller that the human senses needed mediation with duty. The mediation, however, came from the conversion of the affections to the beauty of Christ, not from artistry.

Edwards also makes the affections central to his argument about love from 1 Corinthians 13 in *Charity and Its Fruits* (preached in 1738).[15] The purpose of all faith and life, indeed the destiny of all believers, is to show love to God and one another from the heart. Here is Edwards on heaven:

With the same ardor will the saints love the Lord Jesus Christ. And their love shall

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[13]Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 124.

[14]Ibid., 2:98.

[15]Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits: Living in the Light of God's Love*, ed. Kyle Strobel (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

be accepted. . . . Then Christ will open to their view the great fountain of love in his heart far beyond what they ever before saw. Hereby the saints' love to God and Christ is mutual, "I love them, that love me" (Prov 8:17); though the love of God to the saints cannot properly be called returns of love, because he loved them first. But the sight of God's love will fill the saints the more with joy and admiration.[16]

The two works, *Religious Affections* and *Charity and Its Fruits*, targeted externality and coldness in religious duty both before and after the Great Awakening.

There is a rejection of worldly pleasures in Edwards's view of heart-change. His "Diary" (quoted above) showed his questions of conscience regarding any pleasure in this life that didn't have an explicitly religious goal. Even though Edwards concluded that such pleasure could be allowed, he nevertheless viewed pleasure as suspicious because of its connection with the passions. In "Images of Divine Things" (No. 195), he said,

> We can't go about the world but our feet will grow dirty. So in whatever sort of worldly business men do with their hands, their hands will grow dirty, and will need washing from time to time, which is to represent the fullness of this world of pollution. It is full of sin and temptations. . . . They can perform no service, no business, but they contract their guilt and defilement, that they need the renewed washing of the blood of Christ.[17]

This was a common point among Puritans. The strength of Edwards's hostility to "the world" is important to remember when considering his view of the arts.

Robin Leaver traces Bach's personal spirituality to what he calls "pre-Pietism" in seventeenth-century Lutheranism. In the throes of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), Lutherans sought refuge in "a more intimate spirituality." Books such as *School of Piety* (1622-1623) by Johann Gerhard, and new hymns with words by Martin Rinckart and melodies by Johann Crüger urged devotional warmth in response to God and warned that externalism was insufficient.[18] These pre-Pietist influences lead directly to Bach, as Leaver illustrates:

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[16]Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 288.

[17]Jonathan Edwards, *Typological Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, Mason Lowance, and David Watters, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 11 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 123–24.

[18]Robin A. Leaver, "Religion and Religious Currents," in *The Worlds of Johann Sebastian Bach*, ed. Raymond Erickson (New York: Amadeus Press, 2009), 123–24.

For example, in his sermons Heinrich Müller promoted a mystic spirituality without which, he argued, worship was merely an outward duty instead of the expression of inward desire. The content and contours of Müller's spirituality take on particular importance with regard to Bach when it is realized that the composer had no fewer than five volumes of Müller's sermons in his personal library, and that one of them supplied concepts and vocabulary for the libretto of his *St. Matthew Passion* (BWV 244). It therefore seems certain that this pre-Pietist spirituality was a major factor in Bach's spiritual formation.[19]

Martin Geck notes the beginnings of the Lutheran cantata, a sacred *Konzert* based on a biblical text or a hymn, in the same seventeenth-century period:

The congregation did not want simply to receive God's word in passive devotion and respond in standardized forms like the Credo or in chorale; they wished to enter into a living dialogue with the divine message, and wanted this dialogue to reflect their dynamic and spontaneous emotional response to it. In other words, aesthetic values played a role in creating the style of the seventeenth century—dynamics, structure, and individual expressiveness—and increasingly characterized how church music was understood; they took their place alongside the more objective function of setting Bible texts to music with choral transcription.[20]

This tradition matured into devotional dramas in Bach's church music, with personal affection for Christ expressed as in this stanza from Paul Gerhardt's *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden*, which Bach used in the *St. Matthew Passion* immediately after the death of Jesus: "When one day I must depart,/ do not depart from me,/ when I must suffer death, /come forth thou then to me./ When in my fears/ thou hast my heart possessed,/ then snatch me from anguish/ by the power of thy fear and pain!"[21]

The focus of Edwards and Bach on the heart was hardly unique to them. It was shared across every tradition of Protestant Christianity. Still, in the context of the differences between the two men noted above, it is worthwhile to remember how deeply they were united by the legacy of the Reformation.

A final common concern between Edwards and Bach is their troubled relationships with Pietist movements within their traditions. Though each man

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[19]Leaver, "Religion and Religious Currents," 125.

[20]Martin Geck, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, trans. John Hargraves (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006), 277–78.

[21]Robin A. Leaver, "The Mature Vocal Works," in Butt, *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, 106.

emphasized the response of the heart to God, they also contended with Pietists who placed an even greater emphasis on subjective spiritual experience. Both Edwards and Bach sought to ground personal spirituality in theology and reason, a priority that kept them in uneasy tension with those who viewed subjectivity as the realm of authentic religious experience.

While Edwards aimed *Religious Affections* and *Charity and Its Fruits* at cold externalism, those works and others were equally concerned with the abuses of "awakenings." Part Two of *Religious Affections*, for example, analyzed phenomena that are not signs of true religion one way or the other. "'Tis no sign one way or the other, that religious affections are very great, or raised very high."[22] "'Tis no sign that affections have the nature of true religion, or that they have not, that they have great effects on the body."[23] "'Tis no sign that affections are truly gracious affections, or that they are not, that they cause those who have them, to be fluent, fervent and abundant, in talking of the things of religion."[24] Edwards showed that stirred-up emotions reduce to mere "enthusiasm" unless they flow from a genuine change in motivation. Points of this kind can be found in many works of Edwards throughout his life, and show his determination that the colonial awakenings not be dismissed as mere hysteria, and equally that they not *be* mere hysteria. But this position meant that Edwards was often dismissed by the young New Lights even as he resisted Old Light rationalism. Paul Ramsey comments, "We may say that [Edwards's] ideas involve a greater sensibility than [Old Light Charles] Chauncy's rationalism could grasp and that his sensibility involves more of idea than the emotionalism of [New Light] James Davenport could allow. . . . Part of the tragedy is that neither extreme understood the genius of this transcending third position."[25]

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[22]Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 127.

[23]Ibid., 131.

[24]Ibid., 135.

[25]Ibid., 3.

Bach's relationship to Lutheran Pietists was similarly difficult. Just as Edwards's controversies with New Lights concerned the defining events of his pastoral ministry, so Pietistic controversies among Lutherans concerned the legitimacy of Bach's vocation. Was art music an expression of true worship or was it merely an external show—or worse, a form of corrupt sensuality?

Like the New England Puritans, Lutherans were divided over the status of the visible and impure church, in which baptized congregants received the sacraments without necessarily living holy lives. Article VIII of the Augsburg Confession taught that the presence of hypocrites in the visible church did not invalidate the efficacy of the sacraments. The Pietists strongly disagreed. They taught that the true church purified itself not with the sacraments, but in small group meetings for the study of Scripture and prayer. The meetings were motivated by a six-point agenda published by Philipp Jakob Spener in 1675, which called for weekly meetings, holy Christian living, de-emphasis of theological controversy, and sermons that illustrated practical piety rather than making rhetorical arguments.[26]

Inevitably, the role of music in Lutheranism was debated along with other liturgical practices. Take the case of Erdmann Neumeister, a pastor-theologian in Hamburg from 1715 to 1755. Neumeister was drawn to the preaching of a Spener disciple named August Hermann Francke, but turned against the Pietists when Francke attacked elaborate liturgical music as worldly. Neumeister was an innovator who crafted a sacred cantata form based on the operatic recitative and *da capo* aria—a genre Bach would not only perfect but also raise to new heights. Bach used Neumeister's libretti for his cantatas 18, 24, 28, 59, and 61. The texts are filled with the warm-hearted devotion of Pietism, but in an artistic form that the Pietists detested.[27]

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[26]Leaver, "Religion and Religious Currents," 125–27.

[27]Ibid., 127; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Bach Among the Theologians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 43.

The controversies ground on in most of Bach's posts. In Mühlhausen, where Bach was organist at St. Blaise's under a Pietist from 1706 to 1708, he was closer to the pastor of St. Mary's across town, an Orthodox Lutheran named Georg Christian Eilmar. Not surprisingly, the two pastors feuded—though Pietism may have been only one ingredient in the stew, and not the crucial one.[28] In Leipzig, the university city where Bach was cantor at St. Thomas's, pastors and faculty were commonly anti-Pietist. Bach's own library contained few Pietist authors—and those represented by works not typical of Pietism. Yet, in the midst of debates, hymnals offered a common store of musical material.

> Thus the important and influential Pietist hymnal, *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* (Halle, 1704), edited by Johann Anastasius Freylinghausen, included some hymn texts written by the Orthodox poet/theologian Erdmann Neumeister [discussed above]. Similarly, many of the melodies that Bach edited for Georg Christian Schemelli's *Musicalisches Gesangbuch* (BWV 439-507) (Leipzig, 1736) were either taken from Freylinghausen's *Gesangbuch* or composed in a similar style. But whereas the Pietists tended to favor the exclusive singing of such melodies, Bach apparently did not intend that they should replace the traditional chorale.[29]

The terrain seems complex. For Leaver, Bach's overall context was one of agreement over the priority of warm-hearted spirituality, but discord over ecclesiology. Bach, in his analysis, was not a Pietist, a label that should not be confused by a spirituality that was held in common between Pietist and Orthodox Lutherans. But for other authors, the personal devotion to Jesus that saturates the cantatas is a stronger link between Bach and Pietism. Jaroslav Pelikan writes, "All the attempts by Orthodox Lutheran confessionalists, in his time or in ours, to lay claim to Bach as a member of their theological party will shatter on the texts of the cantatas and the *Passions*, many (though by no means all) of which are permeated by the spirit of Pietism."[30] Yet, Bach

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[28]Leaver, "Religion and Religious Currents," 128; Martin Geck, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 75; Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 113.

[29]Leaver, "Religion and Religious Currents," 129.

[30]Pelikan, *Bach Among the Theologians*, 57.

was not a true-believing Pietist either because "Bach shared none of Pietism's niggling prudery about 'frivolous pleasures.' It would be impossible to square such an attitude with all the 'Allemanden, Couranten, Sarabanden, Giguen, Menuetten, und anderen Galanterien' that comprise part 1 of the *Clavier-Ubung*."[31] Christoph Wolff also emphasizes the broad impact of Pietism while noting that Bach did not allow himself to get drawn into the Pietist-Orthodox controversies.[32]

For our purposes, it is enough to observe that Edwards and Bach both occupied a difficult middle ground between formalism and Pietism in their respective traditions. Their priority was a deep response of the affections to the glory of God in Christ. Yet their emphasis was equally on the theological and rational structure that provoked such a response—Edwards in the doctrinal and philosophical logic of God's created order, Bach in the physical and musical laws that God made in his universe. Neither man would permit a neglect of one priority or the other. Human potential required both.

Bach and the Created Order

When Bach went to Cöthen in 1717, he was embarking on a six-year sojourn away from the courts of Lutheranism in a Calvinist principality. Prince Leopold hired Bach as *Kapellmeister* not for church music, which was sharply limited according to Calvinist strictures, but for completely secular purposes.[33] Leopold was like many German princes of the time in his devotion to the secular arts. Geck writes that Leopold wanted "to transform Cöthen into a court of the Muses."[34]

Bach likely provided weekly performances of instrumental music for Leopold

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[31]Pelikan, *Bach Among the Theologians*, 64.

[32]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 113–14.

[33]Geck, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 99; Friedrich Smend, *Bach in Köthen*, trans. Stephen Daw (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1985), 27.

[34]Geck, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 101.

and his court. The list of works that scholars confidently date from the Cöthen period forms the heart of Bach's instrumental corpus: "the *Brandenburg Concertos*, the *French Suites*, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, the *Sonatas and Partitas* for solo violin, and the *Suites* for solo cello (even if some of them may be of earlier origin), were performed at various courtly functions."[35] The purely instrumental music, now composed to order for a secular prince and shorn of the preaching mission Bach had had as a composer in the Lutheran liturgy,[36] offers a look at his thinking about the large questions of the created order.

Still, the quest to understand the structure of Bach's thinking is frustrated by two equally clear facts. First, he left a musical corpus that is systematic at every level, from the broad design of artistic projects down to the fine-grained details of his compositional choices. His systematic breadth and depth cry out for some explanation. Bach had a well-developed concept of the created order in which he worked. But what compositional principles governed his thinking? Second, Bach left no treatise, letter, or essay addressing these matters. As Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Johann Friedrich Agricola wrote in their "Obituary" (published in 1754), "Our lately departed Bach did not, it is true, occupy himself with deep theoretical speculations on music, but was all the stronger in the practice of the art."[37] The music, for J. S. Bach, was the treatise. But how can one understand his thinking without the benefit of a theory in his own words?

Research on this problem uses three approaches. First, scholars analyze the logic of Bach's compositions themselves. Second, scholars examine the arguments of men associated with Bach who were likely writing under his direction. Third, scholars

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[35]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 196.

[36]Smend, *Bach in Köthen*, 109.

[37]Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Johann Friedrich Agricola, "Obituary," in *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, ed. Hans T. David (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 307.

compare the intellectual environment in which Bach worked with Bach's compositional procedures. Using these three approaches, a great deal has been uncovered about Bach's concept of the created order. In crucial ways, he saw himself as a technological researcher, experimenting with God's laws to glorify him and to refresh the human spirit. Wolff writes, "No less affected by 'the dream of intellectual unity' than the leading thinkers of his generation, Bach pursued his own empirical line of inquiry by exploring 'the most hidden secrets of harmony with the most skilled artistry': by expanding—in scope, scale, and detail—the known limits of musical performance and composition."[38]

In the first approach, scholars use inductive analysis of Bach's styles, genres, forms, harmonies, instrumentations, etc., to reach conclusions about his goals and worldview. Robert Marshall argues, for example, that Bach was aiming at a universal style of music that invites players and focused listeners into a transcendent experience, belonging "not in a recital hall—or even in an eighteenth-century salon or 'chamber'— but on one's own music stand. They are not so much meant to be merely 'listened' to, but to be played—and studied. In this, Bach's position in our musical life is absolutely unique."[39] A conclusion like this is well-supported not only by internal analysis but also in contemporaneous literature about Bach's music. Another example of this approach is Geck's treatment of the "demonstration cycles" Bach composed in Cöthen. He shows how Bach explored such fields as counterpoint, new technologies for tuning keyboard instruments, unusual combinations of instruments, or multi-voice writing for a single violin. These sets of pieces constituted a statement of "the fundamental skills of his art."[40] Wolff analyzes the editions Bach published of much of the same corpus and concludes that they feature "an order constructed with a view to symbolic implications. Bach's

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[38]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 6.

[39]Robert Lewis Marshall, "On Bach's Universality," in *The Music of Johann Sebastian Bach: The Sources, the Style, the Significance* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1989), 70.

[40]Geck, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 525–49.

cyclic dispositions emanate apparently from the thought that the microcosmic order must be mirrored in a macrocosmic order in rational correspondence."[41] Wolff also analyzes Bach's transcriptions of Antonio Vivaldi's concertos, concluding that Bach absorbed a kind of "musical thinking" from Vivaldi's compositions. "What Bach dubbed musical thinking was, in fact, nothing less than the conscious application of generative and formative procedures—the meticulous rationalization of the creative act."[42] Even analyses of purely instrumental works like the *Brandenburg Concertos* can range into social and theological comment with some justification, as in Michael Marissen's argument that Bach's unusual instrumentations in the set carried implications for social equality.[43]

Scholars are broadly agreed about the coherence of Bach's corpus, and the correspondence he saw between a rightly composed work of music and God's composition of the universe. Can analysis of Bach's music take us further than this sort of rationalism?

Wolff analyzes the *Trias harmonica* (BWV 1072), a canon that demonstrates how polyphony yields the triad, Western harmony's central structure. Melodically, the canon is based on the natural hexachord of the medieval diatonic scale, from C to A. Harmonically, it distinguishes between consonant and dissonant tones by placing consonances on strong beats. It also divides time and space, using two choirs separated and performing distinct material.[44] Wolff comments:

> Surprisingly, the little canon turns out to offer a profound lesson in music theory, composition, philosophy, theology, and above all in the unity of knowledge. What

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[41]Christoph Wolff, "Principles of Design and Order in Bach's Original Editions," in *Bach: Essays on His Life and Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 358.

[42]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 170.

[43]Michael Marissen, *The Social and Religious Designs of J. S. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[44]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 336–37.

may initially look and sound like a primitive piece of music reveals its sophisticated construction as a true mirror of the well-ordered universe, illustrating how counterpoint generates harmony and rhythm and how the abstract philosophical concepts of space and time coalesce in a concrete musical subject to create the *trias harmonica naturalis*, the C-major triad, which is the only truly perfect chordal harmony . . . . It is this sound that symbolized the dogma of the Holy Trinity. Like no other combination of tones, the natural triad could make audible and believable the *trias perfectionis et similitudinis* (the triad of perfection and [God-] likeness), the abstract "image of divine perfection," and, at the same time, the essential identity between the Creator and the universe.

Bach's annotations in the Calov Bible make clear that he saw "the directing hand of the world's Creator in the branch of science he knew best and probably better than anyone else in his day." A little work like BWV 1072 is just one demonstration of his "concentrated approach" to music.

> In the final analysis, this approach provides the key to understanding his never-ending musical empiricism, which deliberately tied theoretical knowledge to practical experience. Most notably, Bach's compositions, as the exceedingly careful musical elaborations that they are, may epitomize nothing less than the difficult task of finding for himself an argument for the existence of God—perhaps the ultimate goal of his musical science.[45]

Friedrich Smend underlines an important theological issue in his examination of Bach's compositions in Cöthen, namely, the degree to which Bach made a distinction between sacred and secular music. Smend finds that Bach would appropriate many secular works composed in Cöthen later for sacred purposes in Leipzig. He documents that Bach's own music library "did not contain separate cupboards for the [sacred and secular] compositions; clearly the composer himself did not make that distinction, which today is regarded as so fundamental."[46] Smend says that there is no recorded instance of theological authorities objecting to Bach's use of secular music for sacred purposes in Leipzig.[47] (There were plenty of other controversies, such as the scope of his authority, the focus of his position, and the finances allotted to his projects.) The sharp distinction

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[45]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 338–39.

[46]Smend, *Bach in Köthen*, 137.

[47]Ibid., 158.

between Bach's sacred and secular music seems to have originated after his death, with the first Bach-Gesellschaft edition of his works.[48] In his reflection on these issues, Smend writes:

> This examination of the composer's Köthen years has brought me face to face with the question of the "secular" Bach with particular urgency. The complete unity of existence that for Bach was utterly self-evident no longer exists for modern man. As he confronts reality he finds himself permanently faced by a double danger. Either man seeks to escape from the alleged narrowness of the church into an illusory freedom where inevitably worldliness is rendered absolute and glorious. Or he, as a "devout person," believes that he can withdraw from the world and all its horrors by retreating, as he fondly imagines, into the enclosed domain of "the religious life," if only for the duration of a divine service or some "spiritual" musical performance.[49]

The sheer depth and cogency of Bach's music requires scholars to investigate his view of the created order. His works are characterized by intricate planning. They are designed to reflect the rational order of God's universe. They are driven by the conviction that life is unified, no part of the cosmos being exempt from glorifying God.

Scholars using the second approach to Bach's work examine the arguments of Bach's disciples, who sometimes wrote under his direction. The "Obituary" by Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel and Bach's student Agricola is considered to be an important reflection of his worldview and priorities because of how close the authors were to him. Johann Abraham Birnbaum's reply[50] to Johann Adolph Scheibe's notorious attack[51] on Bach's style in 1737 is a document that scholars believe Bach helped prepare, and has become another important source of insight into Bach's thought.

The Scheibe controversy, which played out in a progressive musical journal just after Bach's fifty-second birthday, has received extensive analysis from many

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[48]Smend, *Bach in Köthen*, 137.

[49]Ibid., 162.

[50]Johann Abraham Birnbaum, "'Impartial Comments on a Questionable Passage in the Sixth Number of Der Critische Musicus,'" in *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 338–48.

[51]Johann Adolph Scheibe, "Letter from an Able Musikant Abroad," in David, *The New Bach Reader*, 338.

scholars, and it would be beyond the scope of this study to summarize all of the issues

involved. However, one of Scheibe's charges against Bach's music bears directly on our

inquiry: Bach would be admired everywhere "if he did not take away the natural element

in his pieces by giving them a turgid and confused style, and if he did not darken their

beauty by an excess of art."[52] Scheibe was referring to Bach's dense polyphony in

contrast to the homophonic, melodic style that was becoming more fashionable. (Surely,

Theodor Adorno's indignation against Scheibe would have been impressive.)

Birnbaum's reply to this charge gives us a view of how Bach understood his

relationship to the created order.

> He [Scheibe] says explicitly that the Hon. Court Composer [Bach] 'darkens the beauty of his works by an excess of art.' This sentence contradicts the nature of true art . . . . The essential aims of true art are to imitate Nature, and, where necessary, to aid it . . . . Many things are delivered to us by Nature in the most misshapen states, which, however, acquire the most beautiful appearance when they have been formed by art. Thus art lends Nature a beauty it lacks, and increases the beauty it possesses.[53]

In Bach's view, expressed by Birnbaum, nature is not the epitome of perfection, but is

often "misshapen." The artist's job is to improve it—he lends it "a beauty it lacks, and

increases the beauty it possesses." The layering of diverse voices in Bach's music, then,

is both an imitation of the diversity and unity of nature, but also a rationalization of

nature, a deliberate working-out of its potential. Polyphony is an improvement.

The third approach focuses on Bach's intellectual environment. Scholars

reconstruct the cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical movements of the time and seek to

place Bach in relation to them. There is a wealth of local literature to work from,

especially related to Leipzig, and conclusions about Bach's worldview using this

approach are broadly accepted. The literature surveyed above regarding Bach's

relationship to Pietism exemplifies the approach. Collections of interdisciplinary essays

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[52]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 1.

[53]Birnbaum, "Impartial Comments," 345.

survey not only the theological but also the political, theatrical, and literary currents that affected Bach's work.[54] More specialized studies from fields like dance yield vast insights into the cultural significance of Bach's music.[55] Laurence Dreyfus's study of the meaning of "invention" in light of the tradition of classical rhetoric is another example of this literature, giving new tools for understanding how Bach thought of his own craft.[56]

An essay by John Butt is of special relevance to our attempt to understand Bach's concept of the created order.[57] Where many assert Bach's vision of the rational correspondence of music to the laws of the universe, Butt seeks to correlate that vision with the thought of Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) and Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). Though Leibniz's philosophy reaches Bach's Leipzig through Christian Wolff (1679-1754) and Bach's associate Lorenz Mizler, Butt does not argue for their direct influence on Bach. Still less does he assert any theological connection between Bach and Spinoza—which Spinoza's pantheism renders impossible. Rather, Butt argues that "Bach's attitude to music, his way of musical thinking, closely paralleled the way in which Spinoza and Leibniz saw the world and its constitutive substance cohere."[58]

The parallels Butt describes are specific to the nature of matter, goodness, and divine immanence. Leibniz analyzed the created order in terms of what he called "monads." A monad is a simple, irreducible substance. The universe has an infinite variety of monads, arranged by God in a hierarchy with himself as the keystone. This

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[54]E.g., Raymond Erickson, ed., *The Worlds of Johann Sebastian Bach* (New York: Amadeus Press, 2009).

[55]Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J.S. Bach*, expanded ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

[56]Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[57]John Butt, "'A Mind Unconscious That It Is Calculating'? Bach and the Rationalist Philosophy of Wolff, Leibniz and Spinoza," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 60–71.

[58]Ibid., 61.

view of substance exalts the particularities of creation without sacrificing their coherence: it allows the integration of diverse perspectives in a single creation. Butt says that Leibnizian thought "sums up a dynamic specific to Bach's music, where the tendency towards variety is constantly challenging, and being challenged by, the tendency towards order and unity."[59] Thus, when Bach writes an instrumental work like the "Chaconne" for violin solo, he views himself as expressing the essence of the whole created order in microcosm. The potentialities in the "Chaconne's" ostinato are to be explored in the particularities of each variation, just as the perfections of God are reflected in the particularities of the universe.

According to Butt, Spinoza's thought adds God's immanence to this structure. Spinoza believed that goodness was an individual's active progress toward reflecting the divine perfections. Genuine pleasure for the human soul comes from the process of performing what God has chosen him to perform. Butt suggests that Spinoza's view is a helpful way to understand Bach's devotion to musical composition and performance. As Bach composes the "Chaconne," ceaselessly tinkering with it, he is enjoying the process of reflecting God's perfection. When a violinist performs the "Chaconne," in Bach's view, he is giving life to that musical concept—another process of goodness in which God is immanent. Butt's correlation is helpful, as long as one maintains a strong distinction between a classic doctrine of God's immanence, which Bach held, and Spinoza's equating of God and nature.

In such a view of the created order, there is no distinction between sacred and secular, but all of life is a unity. Music, therefore, is a crucial way in which spirituality pervades every sphere of life. It both speaks to the deepest human needs and realizes the highest human potential.

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[59]Butt, "Wolff, Leibniz and Spinoza," 62, 64.

Edwards and Bach

The outlines of Bach's concept of creation are well-established in his work and in his cultural and intellectual context. Jonathan Edwards also had great deal to say about such things. His theories about the nature of the created order are, in some ways, easier to examine than Bach's because Edwards argued them in detail. To sharpen the account of human need and potential their concepts entailed, a point-by-point comparison of their agreements and disagreements will be useful.

Unity-in-Diversity

Bach's music bears witness that creation's unity-in-diversity is essential to its beauty. Edwards had a similar idea that creation's unity-in-diversity—among its other qualities—is beautiful and glorifies God. In fact, Edwards's whole concept of beauty assumed diversity because he defined beauty relationally. He wrote of "The Beauty of the World" that it "consists wholly of sweet mutual consents, either within itself, or with the Supreme Being."[60] He articulated a principle for evaluating the beauty of relationships in "The Mind":

> Some have said that all excellency is harmony, symmetry or proportion; but they have not yet explained it. We would know why proportion is more excellent than disproportion, that is, why proportion is pleasant to the mind and disproportion unpleasant. Proportion is a thing that may be explained yet further. It is an equality, or likeness of ratios; so that it is the equality that makes the proportion. Excellency therefore seems to consist in equality.[61]

"Equality" served as Edwards's aesthetic rule for reconciling diversity in complex relationships. Even further, Edwards found typology in complexity. In No. 154 of "Images of Divine Things," Edwards describes the intricacy of the greater and lesser "wheels" of bodies revolving in the heavens as a type of God's elaborate providence,

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[60]Jonathan Edwards, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 6 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 305.

[61]Ibid., 332.

admiring the complexity and coherence of the whole.[62]

This belief about the beauty of creation was foundational for a key tenet of the Reformation. If the diversity of creation is a good, then the diversity of individual human beings reflecting God's image is the apex of that good. The faith, hope, and love of the individual in relation to God and others is part of the world's beauty. Human potential is not measured by collective experience alone, but by the direct relationship each individual has to the Creator. The contrast with the totalizing, assimilating, impersonal power of Hegelian history remaking collective humanity is striking.

God's Immanence

Bach's annotations in his Calov Bible show that he believed God to be present in his grace wherever there is devotional music. Edwards emphatically agreed that God is immanent in the physical world, arguing for divine immanence philosophically. For instance, Edwards did not define solidity the way philosophers usually did, as extension. Edwards defined solidity as resistance. For him, resistance was not a physical quality, but an act of will. Thus, he argued that God's mind is upholding every atom.[63]

Still, consider Bach's Calov annotations further. The composer saw musical acts as spiritual in nature. Did Edwards agree that human artists participate in spiritual realities through physical acts? This question calls for more caution. On the one hand, his "Personal Narrative" (quoted above) often seemed to merge the observation of nature with divine encounters. Edwards did not seem to bother about whether his spontaneous singing in the fields was a form of participation with God. Rather, his singing was part of the encounter. On the other hand, Edwards argued that our perception of and participation in divine things comes only through the light of the Holy Spirit. Our natural faculties are

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[62]Edwards, *Typological Writings*, 104–5.

[63]Edwards, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, 350–51.

not excluded, but the perception of God comes immediately from him.[64] It is more likely that Edwards saw physical things only as types, or images, of divine things, as he says in "The Beauty of the World":

> As to the corporeal world, though there are many other sorts of consents, yet the sweetest and most charming beauty of it is its resemblance of spiritual beauties. The reason is that spiritual beauties are infinitely the greatest, and bodies being but the shadows of beings, they must be so much the more charming as they shadow forth spiritual beauties. This beauty is peculiar to natural things, it surpassing the art of man.[65]

While Edwards agreed about the immanence of God in the created order, he likely would have rejected the idea that music was a medium of God's grace. He would only have accepted music as a type.

Both the agreement and the qualification on this point are significant for understanding how Bach related to the Reformation's account of human need and potential. God's immanent presence in his creation meant that human beings were not tied to sacerdotal trappings and sacred spaces to commune with God. In Christ, believers had unfettered access to God wherever they were, whatever they were doing. The grace and power for a change of heart toward God were everywhere. For Bach, in his workmanlike understanding of music, this meant that God was with the boy pumping air through the organ, with the voices of the singers, and with the gut strings on the violins, and that his grace was available through all these means because of Christ—the only priest. Edwards, however, reflecting English Puritans broadly, would have detected a residue of papal sacramentalism in Bach's statement. He would have resisted the interposition of anything fleshly between human beings and God.

Even so, the two men's emphasis was the same: human need is met by God

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[64]Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 121–40.

[65]Edwards, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, 305.

directly. God is not distant. He is here. Again, the contrast with the other thinkers we've surveyed is stark. For Schiller, beauty is only available in the artist's "magic circle," and the purity of reason is even farther beyond. For Hegel, God is at work through the dialectic of history in the state. In the spirituality of Kandinsky and Mondrian, the masses need the artist as a high priest so that they can access the universal subjectivity inside them. And, of course, for dialectical materialists, there is no God.

Improvements

Birnbaum wrote on Bach's behalf that an artist should improve nature. Would Edwards have agreed that what is "misshapen" in nature can be improved by human artistry?

Edwards's comments on human artistry were rare. In "The Nature of True Virtue," he mentioned the beauty of a building, "gracefulness of motion, or harmony of voice," and also of "understanding and speculation."[66] But he passed on directly. He mentioned lively singing or affecting preaching, but only in connection with exciting a deeper heart-response to God.[67] By contrast, Miscellany 108, "The Excellency of Christ," described one's being "charmed" by beauty "not under the notion of a corporeal, but a mental beauty." And when one observes the beauty of nature, which Edwards described at some poetic length, one only sees aspects of the beauty of Jesus Christ.[68] There was not much room in Edwards's rapturous accounts of nature for anything "misshapen." Nor did he have much interest in human improvements.

Would Edwards agree with a Spinozian concept of process—or at least with Bach's priority on perfecting his works, tinkering with pieces, and performing as a way

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[66]Edwards, "True Virtue," 539.

[67]Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 121.

[68]Jonathan Edwards, *The Miscellanies*, ed. Thomas A. Schafer, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 278–79.

of realizing a musical concept? Edwards certainly believed that God launched a cosmic

process of realizing his glory and love in the created order. In "The End for which God

Created the World," he wrote,

> He would therefore determine that the whole universe, including all creatures
> animate and inanimate, in all its actings, proceedings, revolutions, and entire series
> of events, should proceed from a regard and with a view to *God* [original emphasis],
> as the supreme and last end of all: that every wheel, both great and small, in all its
> rotations, should move with a constant invariable regard to him as the ultimate end
> of all; as perfectly and uniformly as if the whole system were animated and directed
> by one common soul: or, as if such an arbiter as I have before supposed, one
> possessed of perfect wisdom and rectitude, became the common soul of the
> universe, and actuated and governed it in all its motions.[69]

It could well be that the process inherent in God's redemptive plan is one of Edwards's

most central themes. He would likely embrace this aspect of Bach's thinking without

reservation.

Once again, there is a contrast with later thinkers, this one on the matter of

teleology. Human potential for Schiller and Hegel, as well as for modernists, was

determined apart from the person of God—even if God's existence was affirmed. Reason,

duty, and history were all described in decidedly impersonal terms. Bach thought of the

potential of the people around him in terms of process—their unique, personal, and

growing reflections of God's own character.

Diversions

A painfully specific question remains. Would Edwards approve of Bach's

"Chaconne?" Suppose one could somehow strip the French dance of its German

bourgeois connotations in the 1720s. Suppose further one could separate it from a social

context that Lutheran Pietists thought was characterized by vanity and worldliness—court

events and bourgeois balls. Moreover, suppose one could position Edwards to admire the

work's design and virtuosity without an instinctive reaction to the rhythm, form, and

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[69]Edwards, "The End for Which God Created the World," 424–25.

mannerisms of a popular dance. If all those feats could be accomplished, then, one has to admit, Edwards never said anything against a chaconne.

The Legacies of Bach and Edwards

Bach's legacy continues to fuel the development of Western music. Mozart's reaction in 1789 to hearing a performance of *Singet dem Herrn ein neues lied* in Leipzig became typical of composers ever since: "Now there is something one can learn from!"[70] Across many styles, philosophies, and cultures, Bach is still the reference-point for musicians—even transcending East and West. His coherent worldview and deep rationale for music has to be considered a primary reason for this legacy.

Edwards's theological and philosophical rationale for the role of beauty at the macro level of redemptive history and the micro level of spirituality was equally coherent and deep. He taught that perceiving the beauty of God in Christ is crucial for conversion and for spiritual life. He anchored subjective life in the deep structure of God's created order. He saw life in God's world as a unity, and he articulated God's immanence in that world, contrary to materialistic philosophy. Edwards had a category for human expressiveness, and saw the need to adapt artistic means to ends, as is evident in his own rhetoric as a preacher. In particular, Edwards saw congregational and private singing as important in spirituality. Why, then, did Edwards's philosophy not yield a musical legacy?

The regulative principle that restricts music in Calvinist public worship is not an adequate explanation. The court at Cöthen held the principle as a matter of conviction, yet Prince Leopold assiduously developed his orchestra and commissioned many of Bach's secular compositions. The later Kuyperian Dutch Reformed tradition also held the principle, yet articulated a rationale for the arts that has helped ignite broader evangelical

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[70]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 463.

engagement today. (Indeed, Piet Mondrian was at the very center of this movement in the 1890s.)[71] Edwards's rationale for the role of beauty is just as strong as these two Calvinist examples, yet there was no artistic result.

Dane Ortlund suggests another possible cause. Edwards, he says, "sometimes sounds like a latter-day Gnostic—implicitly commending the spiritual world to the neglect of the material world."[72] Indeed, there is a strong sense of neo-Platonism in Edwards that many scholars have analyzed.[73] It could be that Edwards's marked subordination of the physical world to the spiritual and his preoccupation with typology do not line up with Bach's concept of the universe. Even so, Platonic axioms alone would not explain the lack of an artistic legacy. There is a long history of Platonic ideas fueling artistic movements, from the high Renaissance up to the present day. Art scholar James Elkins, for example, argues that the religious presuppositions of the contemporary art world are Gnostic.[74] There is no historical reason why Edwards's Platonism should not actually inspire art.

Still another explanation might be that American Puritanism had no artistic heritage from which followers of Jonathan Edwards might have drawn. For example, a Puritan pastor would not have been trained at the musical level of a Lutheran counterpart. This observation may be accurate, but still does little more than kick the need for an explanation back to the previous centuries. Why, then, did Puritans not have an artistic heritage?

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[71]Jonathan A. Anderson and William A. Dyrness, *Modern Art and the Life of a Culture: The Religious Impulses of Modernism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 175–76.

[72]Dane C. Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life: Alive to the Beauty of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 186.

[73]E.g., Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 413–416; Emily Stipes Watts, "The Neoplatonic Basis of Jonathan Edwards' 'True Virtue,'" *Early American Literature* 10, no. 2 (October 1, 1975): 179–89.

[74]James Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

The best answer may lie in the similarities between Edwards and the Lutheran Pietists. While Edwards was in a middle ground between New and Old Lights among Puritans, it was not the same middle ground that Bach seems to have occupied among Lutherans. Bach, together with the other innovators of the Lutheran cantata, expressed Pietist spirituality in a form that Pietists condemned as worldly. Pelikan was right to say that the Pietist attitude against frivolous pleasures cannot be reconciled with the dances in a Bach partita. For an explanation as to why Edwards's rationale for beauty lacks a corresponding artistic legacy, his Pietistic conception of worldliness serves very well. In such matters as a chaconne, Edwards's silence communicates best. Such things do not redeem the time.

Bach was not silent about such diversions. Human need and potential demanded the appropriation of every aspect of life for the glory of God and the refreshment of the spirit.

CHAPTER 5

J. S. BACH AND DANCE

Pianist James Rhodes wrote a memoir of being raped repeatedly when he was a small boy. More precisely, he recounted the aftermath of five years of sexual abuse—emotional problems, addiction, broken relationships, medications, and hospitalizations. He became an "automaton," able to "fake feelings of empathy" and give appropriate responses in social situations. "But I felt nothing," he wrote.[1] Rhodes referred to many pieces of classical music in his book, but one work was at the center of his experience.

"There was a piece that Bach wrote around 1720," he said, "which was described by Yehudi Menuhin as 'the greatest structure for solo violin that exists'. I'd go much further than that. If Goethe was right and architecture is frozen music . . . this piece is a magical combination of the Taj Mahal, the Louvre and St. Paul's Cathedral."[2] Rhodes was describing Bach's "Chaconne." When he was seven, Rhodes found a cassette tape of Ferruccio Busoni's transcription of the work for piano—a live performance. When Rhodes listened to it on his "battered old Sony machine" he went "further inside myself. It felt like being freezing cold and climbing into an ultra-warm and hypnotically comfortable duvet with one of those £3,000 NASA-designed mattresses underneath me. I had never, ever experienced anything like it before." Rhodes said that the piece "mended" what was "ripped apart" inside him. "Effortlessly and instantly."[3]

Any time I felt anxious (any time I was awake) [the "Chaconne"] was going round

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[1]James Rhodes, *Instrumental: A Memoir of Madness, Medication and Music* (London: Canongate, 2015), 32.

[2]Ibid., 31.

[3]Ibid., 36–37.

in my head. Its rhythms were being tapped out, its voices played again and again, altered, explored, experimented with. I dove inside it as if it were some kind of musical maze and wandered around happily lost. It set me up for life; without it I would have died years ago, I've no doubt. But with it, and with all the other music that it led me to discover, it acted like a force field that only the most toxic and brutal pain could penetrate.[4]

Amid stacks of tomes devoted to theorizing about art, one can forget what art has the power to do. The field of aesthetics sometimes becomes so cold that finding a worthy creation to explore can degrade from a matter of gut-level urgency to an intellectual game. Whoever performed Busoni's transcription on that cassette tape had no idea what those sounds would mean to a seven-year-old James Rhodes—that the sounds would become "a force field" against anxiety. Alexandre Tharaud, another pianist cited at the beginning of this study, has said that he feels better physically and emotionally after playing Bach, and that Bach's music speaks directly to people like Parisians traumatized by terrorism in 2015. The presence of artistic expression in the midst of pain is no small matter.

These musings raise a question. What sort of world was Bach living in? He was writing French dances for a German prince. Why? Was he pandering to court fashions? Or was something deeper happening in German principalities during those years?

The Thirty Years' War

From 1618 to 1648, Germany was ripped apart by a savage civil war between Catholic and Protestant nobles. The war entangled the Holy Roman Empire, France, and Sweden in some of the most violent aftershocks of the Reformation. For Germans, the Thirty Years' War was economically ruinous. It led to an almost total breakdown of civic life. But most significantly, it was a physical trauma, devastating land, homes, and families. Estimates of the number of combatants over the course of the whole war run

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[4]Rhodes, *Instrumental*, 37.

well over a million.[5] There was scarcely a place in Germany that didn't bear some scar of atrocity. A day's walk from Cöthen, where Bach served as *Kapellmeister* in the 1720s, was the city of Magdeburg. In the 1620s, it was a symbol of Protestant resistance to Catholic armies, which had laid siege to it for years. On May 20, 1631, Magdeburg fell. After it was sacked, its buildings and citizens were consumed by fire and massacre in a "virtual annihilation."[6]

It is worth recounting how war became a way of life for Germans. Famines, reports John Gagliardo, "produced diets which included grass, bean stalks, dogs, cats, rats (and even their cooked skins), not to mention human flesh, which more than a few accounts mention as procured from the gallows, from graveyards, unwary strangers (or neighbours), or even from new-born babies."[7] In addition to massacres like Magdeburg, peasants had to fear "spot killings" from marauding soldiers looking for food. Cities in "broad, permanent war zones" became impoverished and hungry. Farmers abandoned their land and joined the armies that had destroyed their crops, and nobles fled their manor houses. Peasants were also capable of cunning and slaughter. Any soldiers unlucky enough to be isolated from their comrades might easily be killed with axes and pitchforks. Money could be made from the grim realities of war too: peasants sometimes guided armies for a price, and would loot blood-slicked battlefields.[8]

To show the impact of the war on the human spirit, conductor John Eliot Gardiner cites the Silesian poet Andreas Gryphius (1616-1664), who "witnessed it all first hand and wrote of the pointlessness of human existence." Gryphius described life as a "house of grim pain," a "ball of false hopes," and a "theater of bitter fear filled with

[5]John Gagliardo, *Germany Under the Old Regime: 1600-1790*, Longman History of Germany (London: Longman, 1991), 73.

[6]Ibid., 59.

[7]Ibid., 70.

[8]Ibid., 71–73.

keen sorrow."[9]

Even after the Peace of Westphalia finally ended the war in 1648, no issue between Catholics and Protestants could be separated from the memory of so much violence. In fact, the same could be said of many issues that divided Protestants amongst themselves. Westphalia encouraged toleration of religious minorities, but the degree of toleration offered by rulers varied. The Habsburgs, for instance, had different policies depending on the year and the region of their empire, sometimes permitting public worship for Protestants, sometimes expelling them from one district and resettling them in another. But among Germans, the strains of toleration more frequently involved Lutherans and Calvinists. Bitter disputes raged in Brandenburg-Prussia, where the Calvinist elector tried to quiet the strife, and in Saxony, where the orthodox Lutheran elector enforced his theology strictly.[10] Gagliardo reports,

> Friedrich Wilhelm [of Brandenburg] was not the only ruler who, while hoping for more permanent solutions (in his case, the reunion of Lutheran and Calvinist churches), had to settle for the much lesser result of simply keeping the opposing religions from mutual public verbal and physical abuse. While merely keeping the lid on religious quarrelling was hardly the same as toleration, it was helpful to the slow progress of mutual acceptance.[11]

The wrangling between Lutherans and Calvinists was a sensitive issue for Bach when he, a Lutheran church musician, took the post of *Kapellmeister* to Cöthen's Calvinist prince. Even in 1720, there lay buried, as it were, unexploded landmines from the war that unwary composers might set off.

By way of qualification, Gardiner warns against over-dramatizing the economic impact of the war. Specifically, he notes that even without the disastrous bloodshed, economic problems would have swept over Germany. The war's aftermath

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[9]John Eliot Gardiner, *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 21.

[10]Gagliardo, *Germany Under the Old Regime*, 178.

[11]Ibid., 179.

was "part of a longer trend of overall decline and shifting patterns of commerce which had begun years before." Trade with Italy was slowing. Commerce came to be centered in the north, "heading to the Hanseatic ports along the Atlantic seaboard." In the grip of this larger crisis, towns recovered from the war faster than rural areas, but even so the slow growth of population was faster than the growth of trade.[12] Observations like Gardiner's frame the Thirty Years' War in reasonable proportions without diminishing the people's misery.

Europe's large economic changes also help frame the opportunities Bach inherited from his family's situation, as well as those he gained in his own professional life. While many regions bore the brunt of post-war economic ravages in the late 1600s, Christoph Wolff notes that Thuringia, where the Bach family lived, benefitted from the changes. Densely populated, with many small towns, "Thuringia developed into an economically and culturally vigorous region" soon after the war's end. "Some of the most important intersections of east-west and north-south continental trade routes made the area particularly susceptible to foreign influences—in art and architecture, most notably from Italian and French traditions." This advantage "paved the way for the early eighteenth century concept of a mixed style of music."[13] Bach was born in the town of Eisenach, which was on "a major east-west trade and post route . . . between Warsaw and eastern Europe on the one hand and the Rhineland, northern France, and the Netherlands on the other." Eisenach had been badly harmed by the war, and had only begun to recover by the time Bach's father Ambrosius moved there. But in 1672, around the time of Ambrosius's arrival as town piper, Eisenach became the capital of an independent principality. It was economically transformed in relatively short order.[14] Thus, Bach came

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[12]Gardiner, *Bach*, 22–23.

[13]Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 16.

[14]Ibid., 22.

of age in a region that was recovering more quickly than others. Even when he went to Leipzig, which had taken much longer to rebound, Bach arrived at a time of sparkling prosperity and even glamour. The city boasted nine banks, influential mercantile families, ornate palaces, elaborate parks outside the city, laid out in a French style, and significant art collections that were opened for public viewers by their owners. Leipzig had the nickname "Little Paris."[15]

Johann Sebastian Bach, then, was a paradoxical German for his time. He was not associated with the bloody past, but was consistently in the avant-garde of growth, development, and hope. In particular, he successfully mixed French and German styles at a time when Germans needed to revitalize their culture and were looking to France for artistic resources. Yet, for all the new opportunities around him, Bach still lived in a ruined culture and contended with the legacy of war, not least in the disputes between Lutherans and Calvinists, and orthodox Lutherans and Pietists. Further, he was as keenly aware of the shadow of death as anyone else, having suffered many of his own traumas. It was Bach's losses that helped endear him to James Rhodes across three centuries. "By the age of four, his closest siblings have died," Rhodes says. "At nine his mother dies, at ten his father dies and he is orphaned. . . . He falls in love, marries, has twenty children. Eleven of those children die in infancy or childbirth. His wife dies. He is surrounded, engulfed by death."[16]

The Lure of French Culture

By the time Bach finished his "Chaconne" at Cöthen in 1720, the dance form was already old and even *passé*. Alexander Silbiger writes, "Bach's formative years coincided with the end of the chaconne and passacaglia's age of glory; by the time he

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[15]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 239.

[16]Rhodes, *Instrumental*, 33–34.

reached maturity they were moribund, except in the French theaters."[17] The form had originated in the Spanish colonies and made its way to France as an improvisatory dance performed primarily on the guitar.[18] (Eric Lewin Altschuler has speculated that Bach's "Chaconne" was originally for lute.)[19] Its ostinato form (the repeating bass line) had been appropriated heavily in both French and Italian opera. It was also used by German organists, most famously Dietrich Buxtehude (c. 1637-1707), and became hard to distinguish from the related passacaglia.[20] But it was far from the newest fashion.

French uses of the chaconne are important in understanding its significance for Germans in the early eighteenth century. Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne recall Germany's devastation in the Thirty Years' War.

> The long period of reconstruction from the civil war was to last over a century, embracing all of Bach's life. Many German courts and cities imported culture from France and Italy as part of a peacetime cultural competition, striving to build brilliant, elegant centers of civility which would outshine those of their neighbors. The standard biographies of Bach contain little about French influence, yet French culture was a forceful presence in most of the places in which he lived and worked.[21]

German use of French court dances was a key part of the reconstruction. To learn the refined French style, German courts routinely hired French dancing masters, preferably from Paris, and assigned them a relatively elevated social status along with doctors, lawyers, and businessmen.[22] Such masters not only taught the latest steps, but more

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[17]Alexander Silbiger, "Bach and the Chaconne," *The Journal of Musicology* 17, no. 3 (July 1, 1999): 359.

[18]Alexander Silbiger, "Chaconne," *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press), accessed May 22, 2013, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.sbts.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/05354.

[19]Eric Lewin Altschuler, "Were Bach's Toccata and Fugue BWV565 and the Ciacconia from BWV1004 Lute Pieces?," *The Musical Times* 146, no. 1893 (December 1, 2005): 77–86.

[20]Jon F. Eiche, "Background," in *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin: A Collection of Views* (Urbana, IL: American String Teachers Association, 1985), 19.

[21]Meredith Little and Natalie Jenne, *Dance and the Music of J.S. Bach*, expanded ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 3.

[22]Ibid., 9–10.

general deportment as well. "These niceties were necessary for anyone who wanted to be presented at court and participate in its activities, because one had to know specific rituals for bowing, taking off one's hat, and other genteel behavior. Bach must have learned these rituals, for he was presented at court many times . . . ."[23] By the early 1700s, French dancing had moved beyond the courts to become a fixture of middle class society.[24]

Bach's direct interactions with French culture are well-documented and seem to have been extensive.

His early exposure to French influence would have been at St. Michael's School in Lüneburg, where Bach attended from 1700-1702. As the town was the most important commercial center in the region, St. Michael's was the region's principal educational institution, and was highly selective. There the teenaged Bach would have been in daily contact with young noblemen from the school's *Ritter-Academie*.[25] Karl Geiringer writes, "The Academy was a center of French culture. French conversation, indispensable at that time to any high-born German, was obligatory between the students; and Sebastian with his quick mind may have become familiar with a language which he had no chance to study in his own schools." Frenchman Thomas de la Selle taught dancing at the Academy using French music.[26] From his youth, then, Bach was at the center of Germany's effort to rebuild its culture with French manners and style.

Crucially, these interactions allowed Bach to absorb French music first-hand from masters of the style, both as a listener and as a player, taking in the whole atmosphere in which the music was played. For example, Bach's connections with the

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[23]Little and Jenne, *Dance*, 9.

[24]Ibid., 11.

[25]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 55.

[26]Karl Geiringer, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Culmination of an Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 11.

aristocrats from the *Ritter-Academie* led to his being hired for their musical entertainments. "As a side benefit," notes Christoph Wolff, "the exposure to French language, etiquette, and style—deliberately cultivated by the *Ritter-Academie*'s training program for diplomatic service—would have been welcomed by the choral scholars [from St. Michael's] as a free complement to whatever financial rewards they received."[27] C. P. E. Bach and Agricola record that, at Lüneburg, J. S. Bach "had the opportunity to go and listen to a then famous band kept by the Duke of Celle, consisting for the most part of Frenchmen; thus he acquired a thorough grounding in the French taste, which, in those regions, was at the time something quite new."[28] This orchestra was dominated by the influence of Italian-born composer Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687), who served the court of Louis XIV and was the French baroque master. The Celle orchestra's repertoire probably consisted of French operas, dances, and airs.[29] Peter Williams lingers on the phrase in the "Obituary" that the orchestra consisted "for the most part of Frenchmen." Williams notes the difficulty even violin virtuoso Archangelo Corelli was reported to have understanding French style from scores alone. To absorb the French manner, Corelli needed to see and hear it done. (Apparently, the player who helped him was a young Georg Friedrich Handel.)[30] Little suggests that Bach himself could have played violin for dances at Lüneburg.[31] In all of this interaction, Bach absorbed such unique features of French compositions as the *style brisé* or "broken style"

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[27]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 57.

[28]Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Johann Friedrich Agricola, "Obituary," in *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, ed. Hans T. David (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 300.

[29]Hans-Joachim Schulze, "The French Influence in Bach's Instrumental Music," *Early Music* 13, no. 2 (May 1, 1985): 181.

[30]Peter Williams, "A Chaconne by Georg Böhm: A Note on German Composers and French Styles," *Early Music* 17, no. 1 (February 1, 1989): 45.

[31]Meredith Little, "Courtly, Social, and Theatrical Dance," in *The Worlds of Johann Sebastian Bach*, ed. Raymond Erickson (New York: Amadeus Press, 2009), 210–11.

of polyphony, in which the number of notes an instrument played (harpsichord, lute, guitar, etc.) varied according to its chord-playing abilities.[32] Bach would take the *style brisé* to new levels on the violin.

In addition to these exposures in his youth, the adult Bach interacted with French musicians a great deal. He knew at least three masters of French dance—Johannes Pasch, Pantaleon Hebenstreit, and the highly-regarded violinist Jean-Baptiste Volumier (c. 1670-1728). Volumier is an example of the quality of musician with whom Bach became friends. He had introduced French violin technique to the orchestra in Berlin, also composing ballet music there, before becoming the concertmaster at Dresden. The Dresden orchestra, which Bach heard, was internationally famous. Composer Johann Joachim Quantz (1697-1773) "stated that he never heard a better orchestra than the one at Dresden under Volumier."[33] (Ironically, as the archetypical French baroque composer was the Italian-born Lully, Volumier was Flemish.)[34]

From his youth to early adulthood, then, Bach received French musical style from some of the best practitioners of his day. He was not fumbling with musical affectations, trying to write pieces that merely imitated French mannerisms. Bach was able to produce music in the style most in demand from German princes seeking to rebuild their principalities from the war.

The French style of chaconne probably came to Bach early through the Möller Manuscript and the Andreas Bach Book, collections of scores that were compiled by Johann Sebastian's brother, Johann Christoph.[35] These collections reflected the determination of German musicians to know as much about music from other nations as

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[32]Raymond Erickson, "The Legacies of J. S. Bach," in *The Worlds of Johann Sebastian Bach*, ed. Raymond Erickson (New York: Amadeus Press, 2009), 46.

[33]Little and Jenne, *Dance*, 14.

[34]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 181.

[35]Silbiger, "Bach and the Chaconne," 365–66, 373.

possible by surveying genres.[36] For example, keyboard suites by German Georg Böhm showed his "cultivation of the French harpsichord idiom, which was principally embodied in stylized dances."[37] French composers were represented in the manuscripts as well: "The Möller manuscript has five suites by royal organist Nicolas Antoine Le Bègue, and the Andreas Bach Book has one suite by the brilliant virtuoso Louis Marchand—both famous French keyboard composer-performers of the time."[38] The manuscripts contained chaconnes by Lully and passacaglias by Buxtehude, as well as details like French ornamentation tables.[39]

Bach's "Chaconne" shows the influence of Lully in particular. It has three sections in contrasting modes (minor-major-minor), a structure typical of Lully, as well as the *chaconne en rondeau* form. In Lully's *tragédies lyriques*, according to Silbiger, chaconnes often became centerpieces "in the form of extended choreographic numbers that celebrated a hero's triumph or apotheosis."[40] French composers also associated chaconnes with another triple-meter form, the sarabande, a kind of seduction dance. Both forms placed the emphasis on the second beat of the measure, a clear feature in Bach's "Chaconne."[41] Bach's mastery of French style must have been considerable by the time he wrote it, given his famous challenge to Louis Marchand while visiting Volumier in 1717.[42]

Marchand was a famous keyboard virtuoso, who seems to have deeply

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[36]Williams, "A Chaconne by Georg Böhm," 45.

[37]Erickson, "The Legacies of J. S. Bach," 45.

[38]Ibid., 46.

[39]Williams, "A Chaconne by Georg Böhm," 44–45.

[40]Silbiger, "Bach and the Chaconne," 363–65.

[41]Little and Jenne, *Dance*, 202–3.

[42]Williams, "A Chaconne by Georg Böhm," 49; Bach and Agricola, "Obituary," 300–1; Schulze, "The French Influence in Bach's Instrumental Music," 182.

believed his own press. Likely at the instigation of Volumier, when both Marchand and Bach were in Dresden, Bach sent Marchand a courteous letter proposing that the two perform a duel of improvisation, challenging each other to extemporize whatever pieces they saw fit. It was a daring move on Bach's part, given the Frenchman's mastery of harpsichord technique and style. Marchand accepted, and the time and place for the challenge were set at the home of leading minister of state.[43] Bach's "Obituary" recorded what happened when all the luminaries were assembled:

> There was a long wait for Marchand. Finally, the host sent to Marchand's quarters to remind him, in case he should have forgotten, that it was now time for him to show himself a man. But it was learned, to the great astonishment of everyone, that Monsieur Marchand had, very early in the morning of that same day, left Dresden by a special coach.[44]

Bach was a proven master of the style Germans most wanted to cultivate.

The Court at Cöthen

For Bach and his listeners, then, French style in general, and dances in particular, would have been associated with the most emotionally significant of cultural aspirations, that Germans rebuild their culture from the war. This was particularly true of Leopold, prince of the court at Cöthen. Leopold's mother—a Lutheran who did not succeed in converting Leopold from Calvinism, or did not try—seems to have steered him away from a military career toward the arts.[45] Bach biographer Malcolm Boyd says, "During the years 1708-10 [Leopold] studied at the *Ritterakademie* in Berlin and then completed his musical education by touring the Low Countries, England, France and Italy. When he returned to Cöthen in April 1713 he was a skilled player of the violin, bass viol and harpsichord, and a good bass singer."[46] Martin Geck adds other details:

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[43]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 181.

[44]Bach and Agricola, "Obituary," 301.

[45]Friedrich Smend, *Bach in Köthen*, trans. Stephen Daw (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1985), 165.

[46]Malcolm Boyd, *Bach* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1995), 65.

In Leopold, Bach finds a ruler who wants to transform Cöthen into a court of the Muses. He has an extraordinary appreciation, formed at a young age, for the arts: after two years at the Knights' Academy in Berlin, the prince sets out on the grand tour, almost completely documented in ledgers and travel journals. During four winter months in The Hague in 1710-11, he attends the opera twelve times; later he acquires, for the steep price of fifty-five talers, "rare works by M. Lully, the printed music"—neither the first nor last purchase of scores on his journey. For evening musicales that he himself organizes, he engages up to twelve musicians. On these occasions he plays the harpsichord and the violin.[47]

Leopold's focus on the arts was more than a personal interest. The Prince put considerable resources behind his pursuit of the muses. Most pointedly, he hired Bach as his *Kapellmeister*. Smend notes that, for the first time, Bach was not only hired to compose secular music, but would actually have transgressed Leopold's theology if he had composed liturgical music. What Chapter 4 showed about the Calvinist Jonathan Edwards was also true of Leopold. He was opposed to any liturgical compositions because of the regulative principle. In fact, even Cöthen's Lutherans "lacked a well-trained four-part choir for which Bach might regularly have composed demanding vocal music." Leopold's musical interests in Bach were entirely secular.[48] Bringing Bach to Cöthen was only one part of Leopold's strategy. He had also hired some of the most skilled instrumentalists. In 1713, Friedrich Wilhelm I had disbanded his orchestra in Berlin. By 1716, Leopold had hired many of them for his own orchestra, increasing it to seventeen players. The Berlin players were Josephus Spiess (violin), Johann Ludwig Rose (oboe), Johann Christoph Torlee (bassoon), Christian Bernhard Linigke (violoncello), and Martin Friedrich Marcus (violin)—all apparently recognized as "outstanding musicians" because each was given the title *Cammer Musicus*, which had never been conferred on any players in Cöthen before. These augmented the excellent players who were in the court already, like Christian Ferdinand Abel (viola da gamba).[49]

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[47]Martin Geck, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, trans. John Hargraves (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006), 101.

[48]Smend, *Bach in Köthen*, 27.

[49]Ibid., 37–38.

Thus, when Bach accepted the post at Cöthen in 1718, he had skilled instrumentalists for whom to write secular music.

Bach worked closely with this orchestra. Wolff says that the "regular rehearsal schedule suggests a weekly or even more frequent program of courtly performances." Though the exact repertoire for these concerts is unknown, the events were "an integral part of courtly life at Cöthen." Bach's works such as "the *Brandenburg Concertos*, the *French Suites*, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, the Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, and the Suites for solo cello (even if some of them may be of earlier origin), were performed at various courtly functions."[50] Given the significant influence of French style and forms in these works, Bach was not using a curiosity as a model when he wrote the "Chaconne" for this court. There was nothing exotic about it. The "Chaconne" was part of Leopold's aim to exemplify the highest cultural values in court life.

None of this should be understood to mean that disputes between the tolerated Lutherans and the establishment Calvinists in Cöthen had somehow faded, as if Prince Leopold or Bach had transcended problems that divided other principalities. Calvinists accused Lutherans, alongside Catholics, of adding human institutions to worship that Scripture alone should regulate. Leopold's own mother, "Gisela Agnes, princess *emerita* and imperial countess of Nienburg," was a Lutheran, and she maintained a townhouse in Cöthen. Leopold's father and mother were both strong personalities who were able to bring differences over the Eucharist and church music with religious tolerance. Smend writes, "There was an openly hostile attitude between the clergy of the [Calvinist] Jakobikirche and the [Lutheran] Agnuskirche that might on occasion lead to barely disguised conflict between those at court, even including Gisela Agnes and the princes themselves."[51] Cöthen needed whatever theological consensus it could build. Employing

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[50]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 196.

[51]Smend, *Bach in Köthen*, 165.

a *Kapellmeister* who worshipped at St. Agnes, the Lutheran church,[52] might seem a poor way to build it.

For that reason, Smend's points about secular and sacred music, reported in the previous chapter, are worth reiterating. The catalogues of Bach's music library do not show a "division into 'secular' and 'religious or spiritual' works. In other words, Bach's study did not contain separate cupboards for the two groups of compositions; clearly the composer himself did not make that distinction, which today is regarded as so fundamental."[53] To the contrary, Bach freely used his "secular" compositions in his liturgical ones. When he wrote purely instrumental music for Leopold, then, Bach did not see himself as having moved outside of what glorified God, but agreed with Leopold and other Calvinists that all pursuits were to express Christian worship.

The embrace of the "secular," was a deep priority that went all the way back to Martin Luther himself. Luther was a trained musician and composer who believed that music was a means of advancing the gospel, teaching doctrine, and bringing the laity into direct participation in the worship of God. For him, music sometimes served as a preaching analogy. He compared the gospel to music in performance, and the law to musical notion written on the page—an elegant way to make a crucial theological distinction.[54] But more fundamentally, music enacted a new ecclesiological policy. Robin Leaver writes, "In contrast to the Roman Mass, in which the congregation was essentially mute, Luther actively promoted the regular singing of vernacular hymns by the congregation within the evangelical mass."[55] Leaver also comments on the significance

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[52]Robin A. Leaver, "Religion and Religious Currents," in *The Worlds of Johann Sebastian Bach*, ed. Raymond Erickson (New York: Amadeus Press, 2009), 105.

[53]Smend, *Bach in Köthen*, 137.

[54]Robin A. Leaver, "Music and Lutheranism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, ed. John Butt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 41.

[55]Ibid., 43.

of this kind of singing: "In restoring the practice of the combined song of the gathered congregation at worship, Lutheran theologians reinstituted a sound that had not been heard within Western Christendom for around a thousand years." The songs came "from translated Latin hymns, rewritten religious folksongs, as well as original texts and melodies." Luther himself called the hymns "vernacular psalms."[56] The term *vernacular* should recall the prodigious effort (and blood) spent on translating the Bible into the languages people spoke every day. In Luther's reforms, music expressed the holiness of all the people, not just the clergy.

Luther's innovation of giving congregations plain, assertive tunes through which to participate in worship was one that Bach embraced. Robert Marshall says:

> Apart from all liturgical and theological considerations, Bach, as a musician, was particularly fascinated by [the] melody writing cultivated and indeed mastered by Luther. . . . These tunes proceed to clear tonal goals, creating a sense of tonal direction and conveying an almost palpable sense of purposefulness. In conjunction with their texts, they project an aura of sublimity or majesty.[57]

Leaver notes that Lutheran hymns became part of the liturgical year, and "the primary hymns of this sequence occur again and again in Bach's organ works and cantatas."[58]

Bach, then, came from a tradition that sought to infuse ordinary life with holiness. As Jaroslav Pelikan says, "The Bach of the *Peasant Cantata*, the partitas, and the concertos was not 'too secular.' These were, rather, the expression of a unitary . . . world view, in which all beauty, including 'secular' beauty, was sacred because God was one, both Creator and Redeemer."[59] From this point of view, Calvinists and Lutherans had a serious disagreement about music and liturgy, but a more important unity about music, human beings, and the glory of God. Simply put, when Bach inscribed "Soli Deo

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[56]Leaver, "Religion and Religious Currents," 118.

[57]Robert Lewis Marshall, "Bach and Luther," in Erickson, *The Worlds of Johann Sebastian Bach*, 233–34.

[58]Leaver, "Music and Lutheranism," 43.

[59]Jaroslav Pelikan, *Bach Among the Theologians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 139.

Gloria" on his manuscripts, including those containing popular French dances like sarabandes, gigues, and chaconnes, both orthodox Lutherans and reformed Calvinists could applaud.

The Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin

Bach crafted his "Chaconne" in a French tradition that played a role in the lives of his listeners.[60] The prominence of popular forms can be seen in the rest of the solo violin set as well. Geck writes, "Bach mixes popular and academic in the violin solos. One popular element is his inclusion of dance steps in the partitas—particularly in the structure of the B-minor partita BWV 1002, where each dance is followed by a double allowing the soloist to play in a style that is virtuosic and yet easy to follow."[61]

Yet, for Geck, the set belongs in what he calls the "demonstration cycles" from Bach's time in Cöthen. The violin works show "Bach's speculative and didactic ambitions," exhibiting melody and harmony "in one," and distilling "spirituality and sensuality, abstraction and tonal fullness, and musical language that is both universal and contemporary to his age."[62]

The two features of the set of violin solo sonatas and partitas—popular and abstract—are easy discuss as distinct, but difficult to unify conceptually. The popular forms of these pieces tend to be overshadowed by their intellectual depth. One consideration surely is that the old dances no longer have the instinctive command of the listeners' bodies that they had in Bach's day. The dances themselves are mostly concepts to people in the twenty-first century. But even further, the sheer power of Bach's designs seems to demand more priority in study. Malcolm Boyd, for example, says that "Bach's

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[60]The Italian title that Bach uses, "Ciaccona," does not undermine the French style. The most popular title seems to have been the Italian one. See Silbiger, "Bach and the Chaconne," 372.

[61]Martin Geck, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 548.

[62]Ibid., 546–47.

mature music is remarkable for its order and symmetry." He notes that Bach tended to group cycles in sets of six—as he does with the *Brandenburg Concertos* and the French and English suites. The habit showed "a guiding impulse in Bach's creative life—the desire to bring a particular genre to completion and then to turn from it to other things."[63] The conceptual plan for the set and the technical prowess it exhibits determines where scholars spend their energies.

Scholars want to know what precedents there were for this kind of violin writing. Music scholar Joel Lester asserts that "there was absolutely no previous tradition anywhere of solo-violin music of such scope."[64] Christoph Wolff is not so categorical: "These works seem conceptually indebted to Johann Paul von Westhoff's 1696 publication of solo violin partitas, the first of its kind."[65] Jaap Schröder calls Westhoff a "colourful personality" who toured Europe before settling in Weimer in 1699—the same place where Bach spent several months as a violinist in 1703.[66] It is generally agreed that Bach would have met Westhoff in Weimar, and would have studied his works. Geck believes that Westhoff's compositions were technically more advanced than Bach's, but not so expressive.[67] There were other works for violin that might have served as starting-points for Bach's set, reaching back to Thomas Baltzer's polyphonic compositions in first half of the seventeenth century.[68] Schröder mentions another source:

> The most influential violinist and pedagogue in central Germany during the second part of the seventeenth century was Johann Jakob Walther, born near Erfurt in 1650 and later active in Mainz. In 1688 he published a collection of violin sonatas with

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[63]Boyd, *Bach*, 86.

[64]Joel Lester, *Bach's Works for Solo Violin: Style, Structure, Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 9.

[65]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 133.

[66]Jaap Schröder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works: A Performer's Guide* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2007), 42.

[67]Martin Geck, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 547.

[68]Schröder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works*, 39.

bass called *Hortus Chelicus* that became widely known study material for several generations of aspiring violinists. It is quite possible that the young Bach used it himself.[69]

Still another seventeenth century composer who wrote for unaccompanied violin was Heinrich Biber.[70] There were models, then, that Bach probably knew and that may have been the germ for his own set. Still, Lester's assertion is compelling: there is a leap from previous violin solo literature to Bach.

Two other questions get equally murky answers from scholars. Did some occasion or person prompt Bach to write the six sonatas and partitas? Did Bach write them for himself, or for another violinist? Lester summarizes the consensus among scholars that "Bach completed his sonatas and partitas for solo violin no later than 1720, the date on his manuscript of all six pieces." It was in March of that year that Bach's wife of twelve years, Maria Barbara, died, leaving him the two boys who had survived infancy, Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel.[71] The completion of his manuscript and the death of his wife in the same year led Helga Thoene to argue that the "Chaconne" was a memorial to Maria Barbara.[72] Her argument has not gained wide acceptance among Bach scholars.[73] (This is the theory, however, that James Rhodes embraces in his memoire.)[74] Speculation is similarly open-ended about the violinist for whom Bach composed the set. Boyd gives the short-list. "It is likely that Bach wrote them for a particularly gifted player—Pisendel and Volumier of Dresden and Joseph Spiess, leader of the Cöthen band, have all been suggested—but they also reflect his own

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[69]Schröder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works*, 40.

[70]Eiche, "Background," 19.

[71]Lester, *Bach's Works for Solo Violin*, 6–7.

[72]Helga Thoene, *Johann Sebastian Bach, Ciaccona: Tanz Oder Tombeau? Eine Analytische Studie* (Oschersleben: Ziethen Oschersleben, 2001).

[73]Altschuler, "Were Bach's Toccata and Fugue BWV565 and the Ciacconia from BWV1004 Lute Pieces?," 79.

[74]Rhodes, *Instrumental*, 35–36.

mastery of violin technique."[75] The lack of a commission or documented occasion, such as scholars have with the *Brandenburg Concertos*, sends scholars back to Bach's own intellectual and technical ambitions as the inciting factor—which again eclipses the importance of the synergy between popular and academic composition that Geck has noted.

There is one proposal that might help explain the nature of this synergy, as well as expose a significant motivation for all of Bach's instrumental compositions. Robert Marshall notes that the logic and consistency of Bach's development of musical ideas may never have been equaled since. "Accordingly, [his works] belong, primarily, not in a recital hall—or even in an eighteenth-century salon or 'chamber'—but on one's own music stand. They are not so much meant to be merely 'listened' to, but to be played—and studied. In this, Bach's position in our musical life is absolutely unique."[76] Perhaps the biggest reason Bach wrote the set was to give focus to a player's own thinking. Perhaps the infusion of a popular form with intellectual depth was simply the charm of a great teacher, who lures disciples into greater knowledge with a sense of play.

On the Use of Popular Forms

Theodor Adorno, it is fair to say, detested popular music. The whole structure of the "culture industry" was corrupt. The commercialized jazz of his day exhibited only fake individuality. Adorno even attacked modernist composers who included popular forms, like Igor Stravinsky. *L'Histoire du Soldat*, Stravinsky's chamber work about a soldier who makes a deal with the devil, cycles through various popular dances in the course of the story. Adorno notes that Stravinsky uses "melodic nuclei" that "bear traces of commonplace music—the march, the idiotic fiddle, the antiquated waltz, indeed even

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[75]Boyd, *Bach*, 88.

[76]Marshall, "On Bach's Universality," 70.

of the current dances such as tango and ragtime." Adorno says, "The thematic models can be detected not in artistic musical composition, but rather in various standardized commercial pieces."[77]

The modernists view of popular art as an abomination created a dichotomy. Any "standardized commercial" art, any kitsch, was what sell-outs produced to please their bourgeois fans. A true artist had the duty to stand apart from capitalism. But the passion of many modernists for this dichotomy set them up for a fall. In music, the minimalism of Steve Reich (b. 1936) and John Adams (b. 1947), with its harmonic repetition and glittering textures was in part a reaction against the high modernism of the 1950s and 1960s. Adams, for instance, gained popularity with a film score sound that audiences recognized, as in *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* (1986), and with dances like the foxtrots in *Nixon in China* (1987). In visual art, the work of Andy Warhol (1928-1987) and Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997) featured the very celebrities and commercial forms that modernists had disdained. Often, these artists used popular forms to call capitalism into question. Yet they were also raising the question, "Why are these forms so awful? Why can't they serve an artistic purpose?"

Here, as in other matters, Arnold Schoenberg did not agree with his would-be spokesman, Adorno. Schoenberg admired composers who were able to express what ordinary people felt without pretense:

> Most deplorable is the acting of some artists who arrogantly wish to make believe that they descend from their heights in order to give some of their riches to the masses. This is hypocrisy. But there are a few composers, like Offenbach, Johann Strauss and Gershwin, whose feelings actually coincide with those of the 'average man in the street'. To them it is no masquerade to express popular feelings in popular terms. They are natural when they talk thus and about that.[78]

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[77]Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster, Athlone Contemporary European Thinkers (New York: Continuum, 2003), 179–81.

[78]Arnold Schoenberg, "New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea (1946)," in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (New York: St. Martins Press, 1975), 124.

It seems fair to say that Bach would have rejected the role of modernism's "alienated artist" as so much posturing. He might have said worse. In his world, trauma called for comfort and the high cost of war put a premium on solidarity. Bach might actually have accused an artist who persisted in alienated self-expression of a heartless betrayal of those who grieve. That may be too speculative. But it is clear that Bach's "Chaconne" went on the music stand of a young pianist beset by anxiety and became the focus of his waking thoughts. It opened a musical maze for James Rhodes to explore— playing and replaying its voices, tapping out its rhythms—and mended what had been ripped apart inside him. At the very least, Bach succeeds in speaking to the grieving because he thought it was important to try.

CHAPTER 6

J. S. BACH AND THE "CHACONNE"

Music for unaccompanied violin is an acquired taste. The technical difficulties
for the player are a barrier to satisfaction on both the giving and receiving sides of the
concert hall. Further, the solitary violin lacks the range of pitch and dynamics that, say, a
piano has. It offers less potential for drama. Moreover, to hear the violin's polyphonic
effects—in which two, three, and four notes are played simultaneously—the listener has
to adjust expectations, distinguishing voices within narrow intervals, and without
significant differences of timbre. Albert Schweitzer complained that listening to Bach's
unaccompanied violin pieces "calls for something of endurance." He said that the
harmony "hangs in the air" without sustained bass notes, and the bow-pressure many
players think is required to play chords across four strings is accompanied by what he
politely described as "noises."[1]

For most audiences, demands of this nature make the unaccompanied violin
literature abstract—removed from normal concert expectations.

Some solo works have become famous recital standards. The *Caprice No. 24*
by Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840) is not only frequently performed, but frequently alluded
to by other composers. The *Sonata No. 3 in D minor* by Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931),
while less notorious, is also popular with audiences. The "Preludio" from the *Partita No.
3 in E major,* BWV 1006, by Bach is both famous and popular. These works have sailed
over the limitations of the instrument and of audience expectations by sheer virtuosity.

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[1]Emil Telmanyi, "Some Problems in Bach's Unaccompanied Violin Music," *The Musical
Times* 96, no. 1343 (January 1, 1955): 14.

But other works, like the *Sonata for Solo Violin* by Béla Bartók (1881-1945), or Bach's *Sonata No. 3 in C major*, BWV 1005, which have the same level of virtuosity as other pieces, have demanding harmonies and have not gained broad popularity.

Bach's "Chaconne" from the *Partita No. 2 in D minor*, BWV 1004, has a rare combination of strengths. It is challenging for audiences, matching the abstract medium of solo violin with compositional depth. Performance time runs from twelve to fifteen minutes—which is not only long for a movement in Bach's corpus but also for a solo violin movement from any period. However, the "Chaconne" offers virtuosity, drama, and emotional immediacy both to the player and the audience. Because of these formidable qualities, violinists want to play it and audiences want to hear it.

For more than a hundred years, avant-garde Western art music has been making demands that audiences frequently decline to accept. Part of the estrangement between composers and audiences has been modernists' view of the potential and needs of listeners. Appropriating ideas from philosophers like Friedrich Schiller and G. W. F. Hegel, modernists viewed their audiences as history's material for its growing consciousness. True artists posed an antithesis to bourgeois culture, forcing audiences to choose sides, either the dead past or the revolutionary future. Art music had to be ruthless. Any consolation for their sorrows, conformity to their corrupted expectations, or concessions to their delusional values was a betrayal of art's mission in the world.

Abstraction became the tool for stepping outside cultural conventions. The more a composer or a painter could purify his work within the holy precincts of his medium, the brighter would shine the work's universal inner truth. A painter had to purge his canvas of literary references and illusions of dimensionality. A composer had to produce a work of music that was autonomous, free from any external conventions or expectations.

With these presuppositions, the artist's duty was fixed: a compromise with the audience was a breach of integrity. No true artist would make concessions to kitsch, the

standardized commercial products that the masses consumed to ease their boredom.

Not all modernists agreed about their duty. For the quintessential modernist composer, Arnold Schoenberg, this formulation of artistic integrity never quite fit. To begin with, he sought to build a connection with listeners. Schoenberg said that twelve-tone music aimed at comprehensibility, and he articulated the importance of developing clear musical ideas for audiences. He expressed this priority both in theoretical writings and in his personal reminiscences of the reception of his music. Schoenberg's understanding of his artistic integrity did not match, for example, Theodor Adorno's interpretations of his pieces. Even further, Schoenberg's innovations did not validate the modernist narrative. The avant-garde loved his radicalism, first with free atonality, then with twelve-tone harmony. He was breaking with the past, flaunting the most basic expectations. But the depth of Schoenberg's conservatism—the extent to which he saw twelve-tone theory as an outgrowth of traditional harmony—was usually overlooked. Later generations of modernists would use his conservatism against him.

There are good reasons to recognize that modernists wandered into a blind alley. Philosophically, there is no compelling reason for an artist to be handcuffed to dialectical materialism. An artist need not be a prophet with a holy mission from history. Artistically, the tool of abstraction is more flexible and subtle than the modernist account allows. Abstraction can be united with life in all its concrete detail. Indeed, twentieth century theorists like Susanne Langer and Rudolph Arnheim argued that abstraction was a merely starting-point for human thought, not the intellect's crowning glory.

If an artist has different assumptions about his audience from those of modernism—a different narrative about the people who receive his work—then the goals and tone of his art will change even if his techniques and medium remain the same. Bach, as Chapter 4 documented, viewed his audiences as needing a change of heart toward God, which God's own glory can accomplish directly. The potential he saw in his audiences was to reflect the glory of God in their individuality. Every part of the lives of his

listeners could give honor to God. Bach's goals in composition and the tone of his works spoke to people as if their need could be met and their potential realized. The artist's posture toward the audience shapes the work.

Similarly, if an artist refines her thinking about the tool of abstraction—the role of removal, presentation, and reference—then she has the opportunity to create many levels of meaning in her work. As Chapter 5 recounted, Bach took dance forms that had a grip on the instincts of every one of his listeners—a grip as strong as the twelve-bar blues has on people today—and gave those forms an interior depth. He also used those forms because they spoke to the aspirations of Germans rebuilding their culture on a model of French manners.

Why does Bach's "Chaconne" succeed in spite of its abstraction? It succeeds because Bach affirmed his audience rather than despising it. He did not use the form to mock their aspirations, but to participate with them. At the same time, Bach challenged his audience rather than flattering it. He left crucial expectations of the form unmet so that he could take the audience to places they would not have anticipated. The "Chaconne" is a respectful, rigorous challenge, neither condescending nor insulting. This chapter examines the work from the broadest levels of abstraction to the narrowest to show something of how Bach achieved this relationship with listeners.

Analyzing the "Musical Thinking"

Christoph Wolff traces the notion that Bach engaged in a kind of "musical thinking" back to the earliest accounts of his life and art. The "Obituary" described Bach as developing his fugal techniques from the study of older German composers like Buxtehude. But Wolff is most interested in the conclusions of Bach's first biographer, Johann Forkel (1749-1818), who credited Bach's study of concertos by Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) with his deepening sophistication. Bach transcribed a number of Vivaldi's concertos when he was in Weimer in 1713-1714. Wolff writes, "Bach, then, recognized

in Vivaldi's concertos a concrete compositional system based on musical thinking in terms of order, coherence, and proportion—an illuminating though abstract historical definition of Vivaldi's art as exemplified in his concertos." For Wolff, Bach aimed in his own compositions at "nothing less than the conscious application of generative and formative procedures—the meticulous rationalization of the creative act."[2]

The notions of musical thought, procedures for generating and developing ideas, and concepts of order and proportion all focus attention on Bach's abstract ambitions, his high level of intentionality. How does abstraction work in the "Chaconne"?

Abstraction, as defined in Chapter 3, is removal or generalization from a referent that invites comparison. Emily, the little girl in that chapter, sat drawing triangles—concrete, individual instances of that shape. The adults around her talked about concepts that referred to triangles—like formulas for measuring them—but were removed from her triangles, more generalized. The abstractions invited Emily to think about her triangles differently by comparing them with concepts. This comparative space can be open-ended, allowing freedom of reflection and association between ideas. Emily also played "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," which she knew as having an "apple" section, a "banana" section, and a returning "apple" section. The adults talked about the concept of A-B-A form, which referred to Emily's song, but opened the door to comparisons that ranged from Gustav Mahler to folk songs from around the world.

This formulation entails that abstraction is not an absolute quality, but a relative one. There is a range of abstraction that depends on the distance between a concept and its specific referent. The formulas for measuring triangles were quite abstract in relation to Emily's drawings, while another comparison was far less removed: "A man

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[2]Christoph Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 170–71.

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named Wassily Kandinsky drew triangles too." This reflective space opened by abstraction is what artists are creating in artworks. They want audiences to enter that space to sharpen their perception and thinking. Artists want audiences to share intuitions, experiences, memories, values, and connections.

Applying this idea of abstraction to Bach's "Chaconne" grants access to the inner workings of its motifs, form, and development, allowing a more clear and flexible understanding of how it is both abstract and concrete. For example, is this a literal chaconne, music people would use for dancing? How literal is the ostinato, the repeated bass line or harmony that characterizes chaconnes? If it is not literal, then what is the ostinato on which the piece is based? How does the structure of the "Chaconne" refer back on itself? Are the recapitulations of the opening bars literal, or do they depart from the original? The answers to questions like these will show that Bach intended some references to be close and others more removed, some connections to be obvious and others subtle. Bach used this range of interaction with referents to control the work's atmosphere, meaning, and relationship to its audience. As one understands the various levels of reference operating in the work, one can better grasp its power as a whole. In terms of the tools of musical form and analysis, specificity regarding abstraction can add perspective. The procedures Bach used to develop the "Chaconne"—reharmonization, voice-leading, arpeggiation, etc.—still call for traditional analysis. But the analysis of abstraction asks how Bach's compositional techniques served the work's coherence.

Analysis of abstraction, in short, focuses attention on a piece of music as a reflective entity, as a work that nurtures interaction and connection. Seeing different levels of reference can show how listeners are drawn into the emotional world of a piece, how they reflect on that world, and why they return to it.

The "Chaconne" contains a vast range of abstractions. Some of these create points of reference outside the piece, inviting reflection and comparison between the social context and the music.

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The broadest, most generic concept Bach's listeners would have recognized was the dance itself. They would have understood—probably as an unconscious intuition—its place in their social context. For example, they would have reacted instinctively to the strong second beat that is characteristic of a chaconne, as well as to its ostinato form. That syncopated accent would have spurred movement in their feet and hands—so much that they might have actively resisted their instincts if they were listening at a soirée in Leopold's palace. This instinctive reaction held expectations for the piece's style and direction. Bach's listeners would have been trying to hear a repeated bass line, for instance. The questions behind those expectations would have been, "How will this chaconne progress? How will it distinguish itself?" Listeners today can't share those instincts and expectations. The dance form is far more abstract—a mere title on a page. Anyone can put in the effort to understand it, but there is no way to recreate the cultural atmosphere from which Bach's chaconne emerged and into which it spoke. Instead, today's listeners armed with historical context might make a comparison to more current experiences of nations rebuilding from war—Germany after World War I, for instance. Nothing can close the distance of the dance from today's audiences, but Bach's "Chaconne" can still invite reflection across that distance.

Another reference in the "Chaconne" is actually an omission, a refusal to meet expectations. There is no bass. Bach makes this reference explicitly in the title of the set of six sonatas and partitas, and its importance is often overlooked. The whole organization of music in Bach's time was founded on thoroughbass. Jon Eiche explains:

> The baroque era was the age of the basso continuo (thoroughbass), which called for a bass instrument or instruments to provide the foundation upon which the harmonies of a work rested. Compositions generally called solos were, in fact, usually written for three instruments: the solo instrument itself, an accompanying keyboard instrument, and a bass instrument, such as a cello, a viola da gamba, or a bassoon. Unaccompanied works such as Bach's "six solos" were so exceptional as to require the clarification that they were intended to be performed "without accompanying bass."[3]

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[3]Jon F. Eiche, "Background," in *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin: A Collection of Views*

Joel Lester notes, "Bach clearly knew how unusual that was, because his autograph score, even before the first note, redundantly refers no fewer than four times to the absence of a bass part."[4] To detach the violin from the bass, while not unprecedented, was a radical abstraction—and not one dictated by the technical limitations of the violin. Bach could have written a chaconne for unaccompanied violin with a repeated bass line, as Heinrich Biber did in his "Passacaglia" (c. 1681).[5]

No one today can recreate the instinctive reaction that the absence of the bass would have produced in Bach's original listeners. But it must have had an impact. Where the reference to the dance form made the "Chaconne" a relatively concrete work for them, the absence of the bass withdrew it from their frame of reference—the equivalent of not having a bass guitar in a band's rhythm section. It would have created an unsettling sense of vacancy.

Bach's omission of the bass remains a strange feature of the whole set of sonatas and partitas, and of the "Chaconne" in particular, to this day. Schweitzer, as reported above, thought it left the harmony hanging in the air. Bach's move was considered too abstract during the Bach revival led by Felix Mendelssohn. During the first public performance of the "Chaconne" in that period, by Ferdinand David in Leipzig in 1840, Mendelssohn accompanied him on the piano with a newly composed part. Robert Schumann, who heard the performance, thought it was as if "the old eternal Cantor himself" had been there.[6] In 1855, a Viennese composer wrote about his own piano transcription of the "Chaconne" that Mendelssohn's accompaniment was needed to

(Urbana, IL: American String Teachers Association, 1985), 21.

[4]Joel Lester, *Bach's Works for Solo Violin: Style, Structure, Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

[5]Eiche, "Background," 19.

[6]Jaap Schröder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works: A Performer's Guide* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2007), 131.

make the work "understandable and palatable for the layman," and in 1873 Joachim Raff argued that Bach's "Chaconne" must have been an arrangement of some other version with more elaborate forces.[7] It is not as though Bach's omission of the bass instrument has gotten easier to accept over time.

Already, there is an evident tension between immediacy and distance in the Chaconne, much of which outlives its historical context. The tension becomes more acute as we survey other kinds of abstraction found in the piece's references within itself. These internal references are purely musical, relying on the listener's memory (both conscious and unconscious) of the piece's structure, motives, and harmonies. Like Bach's *Passacaglia* for organ, the "Chaconne" is a piece of musical architecture designed to be explored. Christoph Wolff writes,

> The structure of a passacaglia or chaconne is determined by the principle of apposition of ostinato variations. Apposition is accomplished in various ways: for example, by gradually increasing technical difficulty; by harmonic, rhythmic, or melodic designs; or by rise and fall of sonority or texture. In every instance the ostinato theme acts as the audible pulse for the entire compositional structure.[8]

The internal references, juxtaposing variations, harmonies, and motifs at every level, make the "Chaconne" much more than a series of variations. It creates a space for reflection and comparison in which the listener can always find new sonic beauties.

With these internal abstractions, the "Chaconne" is a kind of kaleidoscope. Bach has loaded the work with colors, shapes, and mirrors. The audience can turn the lens any way it wants, approach the music from any point of view within the work, and see a fresh and entirely coherent pattern. Indeed, the "Chaconne" is a miraculous kaleidoscope, as though every time one turns the lens the pattern recreates a rose window from a different cathedral.

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[7]Schröder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works*, 134.

[8]Christoph Wolff, *Bach: Essays on His Life and Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 306.

There are, for example, repetitions of the opening eight bars at two points in the piece (mm. 125-133, 249-257). After long periods of development, these repetitions serve as structural markers, reorienting the listener to the original material—or, as Wolff might say, bringing the listener's ear back to the pulse. In this case, much of the distance between the reference and the referent is just the passage of time. The repetition in mm. 125-133 closes the first D-minor section, and the one in mm. 249-257 closes the entire piece. Yet neither repetition is literal, as if Bach just wanted to remind listeners what the opening music was. Both repetitions reflect, and in some ways consummate, the developments Bach produced throughout the piece. (Some of the developments will be analyzed below.) These markers, while significant, constitute a relatively broad level of musical abstraction, and should be considered aspects of the chaconne form itself insofar as they create a French *chaconne en rondeau*.

A narrower level is the relationship between theme and variations. The consensus seems to be that there are sixty-three or sixty-four variations in the "Chaconne." The "theme" contains many ambiguities, so much that scholars even debate what exactly the theme is. Still, the listener is presented with a stable relationship between the opening measures and the unfolding material that follows. In spite of the many ambiguities we will explore, there are strong imitative relationships between the variations and the opening bars, through which Bach satisfies the listener's expectations for the piece.

A much narrower level of abstraction consists in the procedure of presenting variations in pairs.[9] This is an intricate way Bach creates the apposition that is so important in the development of material. The second variation in each pair often expands on the first. In example 1, the variation in mm. 25-28 moves in eighth-note

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[9]Sister Felicitas Curti, "J. S. Bach's Chaconne in D Minor: A Study in Coherence and Contrast," in Eiche, *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin*, 81–83.

motion, accelerating in the next variation in mm. 29-32 to sixteenth-notes, thus moving twice as fast.

Example 1. "Chaconne" mm. 25-32[10]
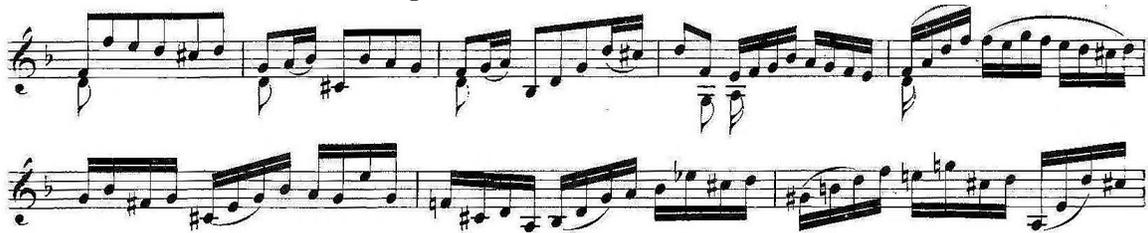
The acceleration, however, is only the most noticeable way Bach develops the previous variation. Bach changes the stressed beat in m. 32. From m. 25, the stress has predictably landed on the second beat of each measure. In mm. 30-31, the second beat is marked by an ascending arpeggio, a characteristic motif of this variation. But in m. 32, Bach shifts the arpeggiated figure to the first beat, adding to the overall feeling of acceleration. There is even more. Bach changes reharmonizes mm. 31-32 markedly. Suddenly there is a B-flat major implication on the third beat of m. 31, followed by a G-sharp minor diminished seventh on the first beat of m. 32. These two harmonies seem to depart from the harmonic scheme of the ostinato. In these paired variations, then, a great deal of development can take place in eight measures.

The pairing method has several virtues. First, it preserves continuity throughout the piece. The pairs lay down a predictable but largely unconscious rhythm that a listener can follow, linking a variation to its immediate referent in a straightforward way. Second, the method of pairing variations can create a sense of gathering momentum, especially since there is often increased activity the second of each pair, as in example 1. Third, the pairings add layers of abstraction to the piece, each pair creating a double-

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[10]Johann Sebastian Bach, "Chaconne," in *Works for Violin: From the Bach-Gesellschaft Edition* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978), 30.

reflection. One reflection goes back to the theme. The second reflection is between the two variations in each pair as they play off each other. This double significance allows a less conscious reflection on the ostinato, adding depth to the emotional world for the listener. The pairings offer, as it were, another way to change the pattern in the kaleidoscope.

Among all of the models and procedures that were involved in Bach's musical thinking, one of the most abstract is his concept of music itself. Like his contemporaries, Bach viewed music as a form of rhetoric. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, writes Martin Geck, music was

> shifting its position in the seven liberal arts, moving away from arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy and over to the side of grammar, rhetoric, and logic. At Bach's time music was becoming more attuned to its linguistic character, and composition was becoming the "melodic science." This science derived from a naturally flowing melody with continuo accompaniment; the melody could be worked into a powerful form of tonal speech. Musical time was no longer measured off by proportion but by how it was experienced. Musical themes took on their own life, and the sequence of movements became more dynamic.[11]

Bach viewed composition as the development of a basic idea, a rhetorical "invention."[12] Development was not necessarily guided by overall forms, as if Bach were filling in the blanks on a chaconne worksheet, but by the implications of the musical invention expressing itself through a particular dance. Bach's rhetoric in the "Chaconne" not only increases the drama, but ultimately deepens the coherence of the work.

In broad terms, Bach's acceptance of a rhetorical approach to composition is well authenticated. Yet the specific theories behind Bach's compositional process, to the extent that he had any, are not well understood. He left no writing on the subject and was famously not interested. As the "Obituary" (1750) said, "Our lately departed Bach did

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[11]Martin Geck, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, trans. John Hargraves (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006), 647.

[12]Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

not, it is true, occupy himself with deep theoretical speculations on music, but was all the stronger in the practice of the art."[13] He was not like Schoenberg, who wrote extensively about his linguistic model for musical ideas, how it facilitated the listener's comprehension of a work, and what technical procedures it required. Bach clearly used the linguistic analogy, but seems to have understood it intuitively. The "Obituary" described Bach as needing "only to have heard any theme to be aware—it seemed in the same instant—of almost every intricacy that artistry could produce in the treatment of it."[14] Scholars extrapolate what his theories might have been from contemporaneous thinkers, but any conclusions they draw from these studies are explicitly tentative. The documents that show how Bach interacted with the aesthetic theories of his time simply do not exist. Thus, any conclusions about how Bach worked out a rhetorical approach to composition have to be rooted in analysis of specific pieces, using internal evidence.

Abstraction, then, works at every level in the "Chaconne," creating a space of reflection so intense that a listener would have to resist the impulse to compare passages.

Solving the Riddle of the Ostinato

The intensity of Bach's music—the fact that however one turns the kaleidoscope lens, it always displays a rose window—demands to be accepted in teleological terms. All things have a purpose. Even when Bach's compositions were instrumental, rather than wedded to a vocal text, and even when the form was secular, Bach's use of polyphony was saturated with God's power, order, and glory. Thus, a matter of form like an ostinato, the repeated harmony that was characteristic of a chaconne, was not just a blank that Bach needed to fill when composing a piece. A

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[13]Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Johann Friedrich Agricola, "Obituary," in *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, ed. Hans T. David (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 307.

[14]Ibid., 305.

simple ostinato would become a musical "invention" that would end up describing

something cosmic. Bach's simplest gavotte would give a fumbling student ways to

participate in God's world that were just as significant as Bach's monumental works like

the "Chaconne."

Still, reading spirituality into Bach's music can be too easy. Chapter 4

recounted how scholars document such implications in Bach's work. Bach saw music as

a medium of God's presence.[15] Bach's theological library tells of his regard for the

implications of faith in his music and in all of life.[16] Bach's annotations in his personal

Bible show his devotional reflection on the theology of music.[17] Beyond his well-

documented theological learning, scholars see a correspondence between Bach's

compositional techniques and the rationalism of Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), Christian

Wolff (1679-1754), and Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677).[18] They see Bach as driven to

express the order inherent in all things. In building such abstract connections into his

pieces, Bach was following Luther just as closely as when he included popular elements.

Luther was committed to fostering polyphonic music in churches.[19] Just as the

commonplace was part of a life of worship, so was the most sophisticated thought.

These abstract implications continue to speak today. Post-Christian Europeans

report a mixture of awe and fear because they cannot ignore the theological roots of

Bach's music. Rokus de Groot describes how people who have rejected their religious

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[15]John Butt, "Bach's Metaphysics of Music," in Butt, *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, 54–55; Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*; Robin A. Leaver, "Religion and Religious Currents," in *The Worlds of Johann Sebastian Bach*, ed. Raymond Erickson (New York: Amadeus Press, 2009), 120.

[16]Martin Geck, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 653.

[17]Robin A. Leaver, "Music and Lutheranism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, ed. John Butt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 39; Butt, "Bach's Metaphysics of Music," 54–55.

[18]John Butt, "'A Mind Unconscious That It Is Calculating'? Bach and the Rationalist Philosophy of Wolff, Leibniz and Spinoza," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Leaver, "Religion and Religious Currents," 130.

[19]Robert Lewis Marshall, "Bach and Luther," in Erickson, *The Worlds of Johann Sebastian Bach*, 239–40.

heritage often respond to Bach on a spiritual level, turning his music into a kind of art religion. Paul Witteman, a Dutch television personality who has rejected his Catholic upbringing, said that Bach's music almost causes him to believe in God "because mortals are not able to create matters of such beauty." Others recount nearly being struck unconscious by the power of the St. Matthew Passion, or having their Christian childhood training displaced by a religious love of Bach's music.[20] In his recent biography, John Eliot Gardiner often returns to the theme of Bach's spiritual power for secular people. Gardiner speaks of the need to step out of the "temporal evanescence" of contemporary life:

> And, if we accept that one part of the human psyche searches for a spiritual outlet (and, indeed, a spiritual input), then however materialistic our society may have become, however agnostic the *Zeitgeist*, for those who have the ears to hear it, the confident and overwhelmingly affirmative music of Bach can go a long way towards meeting this need.[21]

The depth of theological modeling in Bach's music, then, speaks beyond his immediate context of Lutheran Germany. It cuts across three centuries of growing secularism.

An especially prominent foray into learned exploration, Bach's set of six unaccompanied violin pieces were apparently many years in development. Chapter 5 documented that the violin pieces responded to an international violin literature that had been expanding the instrument's technical capabilities for a century.[22] German virtuosi had been writing solo violin works for some time: Thomas Baltzer, Johann Jakob Walther, Johann Paul Westhoff, Georg Pisendel, and Heinrich Biber were the most

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[20]Rokus de Groot, "And Nowhere Bach. Bach Reception in a Late Twentieth-Century Dutch Composition by Elmer Schönberger," *Tijdschrift van de Koninklijke Vereniging Voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis* 50, nos. 1/2 (January 1, 2000): 145–58.

[21]John Eliot Gardiner, *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 17.

[22]Rebecca Schaefer Cypess, "Biagio Marini and the Meanings of Violin Music in the Early Seicento" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2008), 132–84; Jaap Schröder, Christopher Hogwood, and Clare Almond, "The Developing Violin," *Early Music* 7, no. 2 (April 1, 1979): 155–65; Neal Zaslaw, "The Italian Violin School in the 17th Century," *Early Music* 18, no. 4 (November 1, 1990): 515–18.

prominent.[23] Bach had met two of these pioneers, Pisendel and Westhoff. He met the

latter in Weimar in 1703, and there is some reason to think Bach began composing his

solo violin works there. Some speculate based on the copy of portions of Bach's sonatas

and partitas by J. P. Kellner that Bach had composed versions previous to the completed

set of 1720. Kellner's copy of the "Chaconne," for example, is three-fifths the length of

Bach's fair copy. This would indicate that Bach refined the set over many years. But

Kellner probably made his manuscript for study purposes, and so the significance of his

version is not clear.[24]

In any case, Bach's timeline for composition was long and his ambition was

broad. He wanted to show not just that the violin could play all genres, even the most

polyphonic, but that the compositions themselves could be deeply coherent. Johann

Forkel wrote, "By particular turns in the melody, he has so combined in a single part all

the notes required to make the modulation complete that a second part is neither

necessary nor possible."[25] As noted in Chapter 5, Geck discusses the unaccompanied

violin works with the other demonstration cycles Bach composed in Cöthen—the

Inventions and *Sinfonias*, and *The Well-Tempered Clavier*—because the violin pieces

show his "speculative and didactic ambitions."[26] Geck comments,

> The palpable new dimension of the compositions is their coherence. A work
> composed by Bach cannot just be divided up into one-voice and multivoice sections;
> even in its original, basic form, the entire thing has a polyphonic structure. Where a
> two-, three-, or four-part harmony transitions into a homophonic section, the
> polyphony is still there, lending the section a multivalent richness.[27]

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[23]Schröder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works*, 39–42; Robert Lewis Marshall, *The Music of Johann Sebastian Bach: The Sources, the Style, the Significance* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1989), 213.

[24]Wolff, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 133; Russell Stinson, "J. P. Kellner's Copy of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Violin Solo," *Early Music* 13, no. 2 (May 1, 1985): 201–2.

[25]Johann Nikolaus Forkel, "Bach's Melody," in *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, ed. Hans T. David (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 448.

[26]Martin Geck, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 546.

[27]Ibid., 548.

Some scholars find a harmonic scheme in the set as a whole. The movements of the Partita No. 2 in particular seem to use similar opening harmonies in each of its dance movements, as if the entire work generates the opening bars of the "Chaconne."[28]

The "Chaconne," then, is a monumental feature in a carefully planned set of works with the highest intellectual goals, making the central analytical problem in the movement all the more important. As noted above, the set of violin solos was explicitly designed without bass, a decision that directly affects the way a chaconne would be composed. If a chaconne is founded on a bass ostinato by definition, how can Bach compose such a dance without bass?

The matter of defining the "Chaconne" ostinato has not been satisfactorily resolved. Sometimes the problem is passed over without comment, as when Malcolm Boyd writes that the variations "tend to labour the four-bar chord progression on which they are based."[29] What chord progression would that be? Scholars and performers frequently assume that the first four or eight bars should be equated with the ostinato on the strength of chaconne form alone. But on closer inspection, the harmonic changes throughout the piece are too pronounced and too deliberate for one to equate the opening bars with the ostinato. Hans Vogt, for instance, states "that Bach by no means intended to hold strictly to the harmonic scheme. He changes it in almost every variation." The listener is "barely aware" of "the constant harmonic fluctuation of the movement."[30] Yet even as Vogt sees Bach's divergence from the "harmonic scheme," Vogt does not say what the "harmonic scheme" is.

Sister Felicitas Curti has dismantled the simplest proposals in her influential essay on the "Chaconne." As a possible ostinato, she rejects the opening 8-bar melody

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[28]Lester, *Bach's Works for Solo Violin*, 143–45; Schröder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works*, 116.

[29]Boyd, *Bach*, 89.

[30]Hans Vogt, *Johann Sebastian Bach's Chamber Music*, trans. Kenn Johnson (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1988), 137.

out of hand, any bass-lines, which vary too widely, and any chord progressions, since

Bach's harmonies are also too diverse.[31] Curti writes:

> The fact that the phrases all have an equal length and begin (usually) and end with the same harmony clearly provides an important unifying factor to the piece . . . . One can hardly say, though, that the variations all have the same underlying harmonic structure. The "theme" of the Chaconne must be something more than the fact that a V chord appears at the end of every four measures.[32]

Instead, Curti proposes that the ostinato is formed by a tetrachord—a descending or

ascending four-note scale.

> The usual expectation that the theme of a set of variations will be stated at the outset is not fulfilled in this piece. Beneath the surface, at a level abstracted from the actual notes, lies the unifying factor of the Chaconne. Underlying the chord-progressions and the various bass melodies is a descending tetrachord, a traditional chaconne bass. This bass is not stated explicitly at the beginning of the piece, and for this reason we cannot properly speak of a "theme" and 63 variations but rather of 64 variations on the tetrachord.[33]

One might say that the "Chaconne" consists of variations in search of a theme.

The fact that Curti frames the issue in terms of abstraction is important. Her

proposal means that the ostinato governing the "Chaconne" is not literal. It is not stated at

the beginning, nor is it heard in a repeating bass line. Rather, it is embedded harmonically

into the variations, where it imperceptibly changes in the background. This kind of

ostinato relates to the music like lines of code relate to a website. The ostinato is not

audible in the performance, nor even visible in the written score, but governs

nevertheless. The most abstract feature of Bach's "Chaconne" is the ostinato itself.

Of Curti's nine forms of the tetrachord (example 2), some are varied by pitch-

class (B), two of them are varied by mode (D and F), one of them is transposed (I), and

two of them are inverted (F and G).

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[31]Curti, "J. S. Bach's Chaconne in D Minor," 76–77.

[32]Ibid., 77–78.

[33]Ibid., 78.

Example 2. Curti's Nine Forms of the Tetrachord[34]

Curti's proposal has been accepted by other scholars on the strength of her demonstrated links between the tetrachord forms and the variations. Japp Schröder, for example, reproduces the tetrachord examples in his own book.[35] One can easily see what these versions have in common: a stepwise descent (or ascent) from tonic to dominant. But the key to understanding the governing abstraction of the chaconne may be to focus on the differences. The chromatic shifts are significant because they put the harmonies on different tracks. There are two that seem especially important: an alternation among the forms from C to C-sharp, and from B-flat to B. In the case of tetrachord form (B), the purely chromatic motion implies highly unstable harmonies. These chromatic changes remove the harmony from the tonality of D-minor and potentially send the composition away from a tonal center.

Where do these chromatic alternations come from? What justifies them? Is

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[34]Curti, "J. S. Bach's Chaconne in D Minor," 79.

[35]Ibid., 79–80; Schröder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works*, 137–38.

Bach's harmonic expressiveness free or implied by some reasoning in the music?

A harmonic analysis of the opening eight bars shows ambiguity in the inversions of the chords. A triad is a chord with a root, a third above it (major or minor), and a fifth above the root. If all triads in music were voiced with the root on the bottom, harmony would be completely unambiguous—as well as rigid and dull. Ambiguity can come from the "inversions" of the triads that flip the positions of the notes. In the "first inversion" triad, the third is on the bottom, with the root and the fifth above it. In the "second inversion," the fifth is on the bottom with the root and the third above. Bach manipulates the inversions, and also chooses to omit pitches from some of his chords. By doing so, he leaves open the possibility that the chord could actually be a different triad altogether. These openings are called "implications," for the same reason that premises in reasoning have implications. If one has a G and a D, there are implied triads from that "premise": G major (adding a B), G minor (adding a B-flat), G-seven (adding B and F), etc. Bach combines the limitations of the violin's four strings and the player's fingering combinations on the strings with the chords in the opening bars to build implications of different harmonies into the beginning of the piece.

The first four bars, then (example 3), seem straightforward except for one glaring moment. In m. 3, Bach writes a B-flat major chord in root position without any preparation—a intrusive kind of move. Alexander Silbiger says it "is fraught with danger, since it will exert a strong pull to move to the relative major."[36]

Example 3. "Chaconne," mm. 1-5[37]

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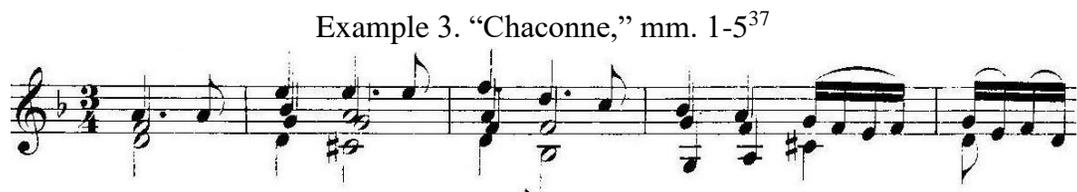
[36]Silbiger, "Bach and the Chaconne," 382.

[37]Bach, "Chaconne," 30.

From this clear B-flat major chord, a passing-tone (C-natural) takes Bach to m. 4, which features two ambiguous chords. The downbeat could be the subdominant it appears to be (G-minor with the root doubled an octave above). But with the fifth of the chord absent (D), the chord leaves other possible harmonizations open. Likewise, the second beat could be the tonic (D minor) in second inversion (with the A, or fifth, doubled), but it lacks the root (D). The dominant-seventh harmony follows on the third beat naturally enough, and cadences on the downbeat of m. 5, though, as Silbiger says, in a manner that's "pretty feeble."[38] That is to say, Bach writes harmonies in the first four bars that are non-committal. They could go in different directions.

Example 4 shows what Bach does with these ambiguities in mm. 7-8.

Example 4. "Chaconne," mm. 7-8[39]

Measures 5-7 repeat mm. 1-3 until the last eighth-note, which is not C but D. The downbeat of m. 8 retains the G and B-flat from m. 4, but makes the harmony explicit as a supertonic diminished major-seventh by adding E and D. Interestingly, the pitches are voiced the same way as m. 4, with the G in the bass and the B-flat on top. But in m. 8 the B-flat is an octave higher, making the intervallic range of the chord far wider. In this way, Bach introduces a powerful pre-dominant chord to bring the phrase to a far stronger cadence.

The chromaticism that varies the forms of Curti's tetrachord is rooted in the surprises of the first four measures. B-flat major intrudes early and in root position. It is

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[38]Silbiger, "Bach and the Chaconne," 382.

[39]Bach, "Chaconne," 30.

followed by chords that sound natural to the ear, but are harmonically ambiguous, implying other pre-dominant harmonies to set up cadences in D minor. Such pre-dominant approaches can include the pitch-classes B-flat (beat 3 of m. 15), B-natural (beat 1 of m. 20), and G-sharp (beat 3 of m. 23). The implications of those events are few enough to maintain harmonic control of piece, but striking enough to propel its drama for almost a quarter-hour. The key pitch-classes to watch are B-flat and the alternation between C and C-sharp, contributing to the eventual increase of chromaticism in the third section of the work.

The ostinato, then, is the abstraction of which each variation in the "Chaconne" is a concrete instance. The starting-points for the "Chaconne" are the broad categories of the dance form and the tetrachord. Bach displays his sophistication through his manifold individuations of those two models. One could put the point differently, less in the language of recent philosophers and more in language that Bach himself might embrace. The "Chaconne" unites diverse individualities in the celebration of the central character, the ostinato, which without being seen or heard shows its power and will in all places of its dominion. The "Chaconne" is Bach's quarter-hour cosmos serving its ultimate Creator. The "Chaconne" is worship.

Observing the Three-Part Structure

The abstract concepts behind the "Chaconne" form many layers. There is the worldview from which Bach worked, the concept of "musical thinking," the dance form, and the ostinato. From these raw materials, Bach carved an intricate musical sculpture, with so many layers of individuality that it can be viewed from any angle and still reveal more. From a technical point of view, how did Bach accomplish this? How did he turn models into music?

First, Bach used the French form of *chaconne en rondeau*. As described above, this form came from Lully's lyric tragedies. It was a step up from a series of improvised

variations in the original dance, which could only last so long without losing interest. The *chaconne en rondeau* was designed at a larger scale suitable for moments of high drama. It was a three-part, A-B-A form, one of the most prevalent and intuitive structures found in music, whether songs like "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" or symphonic movements like Mahler's "Adagietto." The key feature of the French chaconne was that the B-section changed mode. If the A sections were major, the B section would shift to minor. In Bach's "Chaconne," the opening and closing sections are in D minor, with the middle section in D major. Inside the three-part structure, a *rondeau* form was also operating, with a recognizable theme that returned several times.

Since Bach had sacrificed the chief tool for cohesion that the chaconne form offered, the repeated bass line, the *chaconne en rondeau* form gave him crucial markers to create another kind of continuity for the listener. It gave him the opportunity to bring back the opening measures at key structural points. (This is probably the main reason why players and scholars assume that the opening measures should be equated with the ostinato. The opening material is, in fact, a rondeau theme.) The form also gave him an opportunity to change the atmosphere of the piece dramatically without losing continuity. The change from D minor to D major in the B-section feels like dawn breaking on a clear sky. Not only the dark tone of the A-section disappears, but the instability of chromaticism is suddenly set right in solid, clear harmonies. Of course, the impact of the return to D minor in the last section, is all the more poignant. The form, finally, allows Bach to vary the length of the sections so as not to tire the listener. The piece is not divided into equal thirds. The first section is by far the longest, the middle section being about half as long as the first, and the final section only a third as long.

These advantages of the *chaconne en rondeau* form allow Bach to compose on a scale that the simple repeated bass line would not have served well. As noted above, the movement lasts about fifteen minutes—longer than either of the large fugal movements in the A minor or C major sonatas. To render the same bass line every four measures for

fifteen minutes would have posed a challenge that Bach himself might not have accepted with an unaccompanied violin, even with the possibilities offered by the *rondeau*. Thus, the first way that Bach individuated and unified all of his concepts was to choose a strategy that opened up a grand scale for the movement, both in terms of length and drama.

Second, Bach used the three-part form to chart for the listener three emotional journeys—which seem to take the listener on a single pilgrimage that is greater than the smaller treks put together. The first part contains multiple accelerations, small climaxes, and new directions. It culminates in a spectacular feat of arpeggios crossing all four strings with a wide range of high and low notes, a feat that manages to be thrilling even in the somber atmosphere of D minor. The second part, in D major, starts serenely in a choral-like version of the opening theme. Unlike the first part, with its peaks and valleys, the second is a single build-up, slowly mounting to another fast, four-stringed triumph. The third part drops the listener unceremoniously back into the somber world of the first part, only with sharper conflicts. So, Bach not only uses the three-part form to give the listener clear landmarks, but also to move the listener through a range of emotions.

If the "Chaconne" is a kaleidoscope, the *rondeau* form organizes all the tiny colors and shapes into broad patterns.

Following the Pairs of Variations

Another tool Bach uses to move from the abstract concepts behind his piece to the individuated "Chaconne" is by moving through the variations in pairs. This was not unusual in ostinato compositions. Just as the large-scale *rondeau* form allowed Bach to generate sweeping continuity for the listener, so the pairing of variations allowed him precise control of the emotional journey on a small scale. Using Christoph Wolff's terminology, the large sections stand in apposition to each other, and the variations are also in apposition to each other in pairs. Indeed, each variation is also in apposition to the

large structure, and so is each pair. It is this constant reflection back and forth from variation to variation, pair to pair, large scale to small, driven by the pairing technique, that creates the kaleidoscopic effect in the "Chaconne."

For all the continuity this device allows, however, Bach still leaves some things ambiguous. As noted above, the consensus among scholars seems to be that there are sixty-four variations—a consensus with which this study agrees. This number is founded on the proposal that the ostinato is four bars long. For example, Curti's nine forms of the tetrachord in example 2 are all built on this model. In this understanding, the opening four bars (example 3) are the first variation of an ostinato that is never heard explicitly.

There is another way to analyze the same music. Hans Vogt, for example, proposes that there are thirty-four variations, excluding the opening and closing statements. He arrives at this number by conceiving of the theme as an eight-bar phrase and dispensing with the idea of pairs. He also notes that, in this schema, some of the variations are only four bars long.[40] The fact that gifted scholars reach different conclusions about how to analyze the "Chaconne" is a testimony to two equally strong characteristics of the work. It combines continuity, on the one hand, with ambiguity, on the other. The continuity can be analyzed in various ways without undoing the powerful drive that propels the listener from beginning to end. By the same token, the ambiguities—how phrases might elide and overlap—might be framed differently depending on a scholar's point of view, but their impact remains the same.

The lack of clarity among scholars about the variation structure speaks to yet another way the work's details can be turned to create new patterns without losing continuity. The "Chaconne" clearly moves in four-bar increments. Yet, with equal clarity, the ear does not receive the first eight bars as two phrases, but as one phrase with two

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[40]Vogt, *Johann Sebastian Bach's Chamber Music*, 173–75.

parts. Bach reinforces that perception by changing first the motif and then the tessatura—low versus high pitches—every eight bars, so that the first twenty-four measures have three phrases that proceed with regularity. The pattern changes, however, in measure 25 (example 1), in which the listener hears four bars of eighth-note motion, and then four bars of sixteenth-note motion. Just as Bach can break down the ear's perception of the sections to four bars, he can also expand it. In mm. 89-120, Bach creates a passage of thirty-two bars, using virtuosic arpeggios to build the climax of the first large section of the piece.

That is to say, Bach uses building blocks of different sizes that are each scaled in four-bar increments. The four-bar ostinato is the measurement behind everything in the structure. Using that increment, however, Bach can make the listener feel that she hears eight-bar phrases, such as the *rondeau* theme, long crescendos over thirty-two bars (as in mm. 89-120), twelve-bar pedal-point improvisations (mm. 229-240), or pairs of four-bar variations that accelerate over time (example 1). The listener can actually take a slightly different emotional journey every time she hears or plays the piece.

<center>**Tracking the Chromatic Build-Up**</center>

To understand even more intricately how Bach unifies and individuates his abstract models, it is important to return to what is stated in the opening eight bars. Here, as suggested above, the concept of invention may be helpful. Laurence Dreyfus has proposed that Bach's music should be analyzed not so much from form or structure—such ritornello form, da capo aria, or any of the dance forms—but from the Baroque concept of music as rhetoric.[41]

Dreyfus writes that the term *invention* was borrowed from the study of rhetoric and was "used colloquially to designate the essential thematic idea underlying a musical

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[41]Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention*, 30.

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composition." It returns to the pre-Enlightenment concept of artistry that emphasized craft, not the later Romantic ideal of creativity or personal expression. *Invention* referred to the oratorical toolbox of topics, with which "one devised or 'invented' a fruitful subject for a discourse."[42]

Dreyfus is concerned with recapturing Bach's aesthetic achievement, which he says too often gets lost in critical analyses. At the same time, he wants to retain scholarly discipline rather than lapse into hero-worship. He writes, "Although the brute facts of Bach's towering greatness within the canon of European art music are easily asserted, it is a far more complex matter to allow these facts to play a role within a sober and scholarly mode of discourse." To create a critical apparatus for such scholarship, Dreyfus has proposed analyzing Bach's works according to five stages of rhetorical development adapted from Cicero's *De Inventione*.[43]

It is beyond the scope of this study to apply Dreyfus's entire construct to the "Chaconne." The concept of invention, however, is helpful in tracking the reasoning that Bach displays in expressing the ostinato. If the *rondeau* theme in the first eight bars are taken as the invention, the "fruitful subject of discourse," one can follow Bach's exploitation of its every implication—especially the intrusive B-flat. Dreyfus observes, "Within the composition of a thematic idea . . . Bach is especially adept at encoding mechanisms that ensure its elaboration, which is the same as saying that complex inversions and harmonic twists are worked out in advance."[44] Thus, one expects to find a correspondence between the ambiguities introduced in the opening with crucial events that come later in the piece. Specifically, one looks to the intrusion of B-flat major in m. 3 as an "encoded mechanism" that will ensure harmonic twists to follow. Consider the

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[42]Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention*, 1–2.

[43]Ibid., 3–5.

[44]Ibid., 10; Joel Lester, "Heightening Levels of Activity and J. S. Bach's Parallel-Section Constructions," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 54, no. 1 (April 1, 2001): 49–96.

first of seven instances (example 5).

Example 5. "Chaconne," mm. 16-20[45]

The line in m. 17 that peaks at B-flat is being repeated for the third time. The first iteration came immediately after the opening theme concluded in m. 9, and the second came in m. 13. It will be repeated a fourth time in m. 21. What is important about this bare, unharmonized figure is that it implies a B-flat major sonority, a foreshadowing of dramatic moments to come. Interestingly, the figure repeated on beat 2 of mm. 9, 13, 17, and 21 in the inversion of Curti's ninth form of the tetrachord ("I" in example 2.) Throughout mm. 17-20, B-flat is not only featured in the top voice, but in the chromatic motion of the lower voice as well. This variation, then, is a concrete instance of the implications of the opening measures, the invention: B-flat keeps intruding.

A second passage is shown in example 6.

Example 6. "Chaconne," mm. 33-40[46]

In m. 37, Bach not only continues the intrusion of B-flat into the variation's first measure, but launches into a quite chromatic progression that arpeggiates B-flat major—E major— A major—D major seventh—G major. These arpeggios take their harmonies from the

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[45]Bach, "Chaconne," 30.

[46]Ibid.

previous variation in mm. 33-36, where Bach gives only a bare chromatic outline in a single voice. Significantly, the harmony that starts m. 39 as G major goes into a chromatic blur, so that by the second beat of m. 40 Bach has used all twelve tones. Again, this variation is a concrete instance of the abstract implications of that sudden B-flat major chord in m. 3.

A third passage shows the intruding B-flat yet again, this time initiating some of the wildest harmonies yet (example 7).

Example 7. "Chaconne," mm. 81-84[47]

In m. 81, where the B-flat intrudes, Bach seems to smear the chords, outlining them in falling seconds and thirds, obscuring their function so much that one is hard-pressed to analyze the progression. There is a strong bass motion in mm. 81-84, but it is not a repetition of the bass from mm. 1-4. Nor do the harmonies refer to the progressions at the opening. The bass motion here is Curti's fourth form of the tetrachord ("D" in Example 2). This variation is another individuated development of abstract implications.

As shown above, B-flat disappears from the middle section, mm. 133-208. The D major section of the "Chaconne" provides a lengthy respite of stability from the chromaticism of the first section.

This sojourn ends with a shock. In m. 209, after a cadence with an octave D (which a listener stills hears in the major mode), Bach announces the new section with a B-flat major chord in first inversion. A more unstable opening could hardly be imagined. The ear requires an A, like the opening chord of the piece, to which m. 209 refers.

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[47]Bach, "Chaconne," 32.

Instead, the listener get this jarring B-flat return to the original atmosphere. There is nothing whimsical or unprecedented about this (example 8).

Example 8. "Chaconne," mm. 209-212[48]

Bach inserted this clash into m. 3 (example 3), insisted on it in mm. 9, 13, 17, and 21 (example 5), and continued to push it toward complete chromaticism in mm. 39-40 (example 6) and mm. 81-84 (example 7). The clash between B-flat and the ear's expected A remains a stubborn dissonance over mm. 209-212, almost like a pedal tone.

The clash becomes literal in m. 229, shown in example 9.

Example 9. "Chaconne," mm. 228-233[49]

The pedal on A is sustained all the way through m. 240. However, in mm. 229-232, Bach sounds B-flats against the A in an insistent manner. He uses this dissonance to launch into the most chromatic variation of the piece (mm. 233-236), in which all that remains of D minor is the A pedal.

The harmonic tension with B-flat implied in m. 3 reaches a climax in m. 237. The B-flat now sounds against the adjacent A for three beats, an astonishing dissonance of a half-step. After a dominant-seventh harmony in mm. 239-240, Bach gives a clear

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[48]Bach, "Chaconne," 34.

[49]Ibid., 35.

resolution into a D minor harmony in m. 241, launching a virtuosic passage of sixteenth-note triplets (example 10).

Example 10. "Chaconne," mm. 237-241[50]

Bach's final concrete instance of the abstract ostinato is shown in example 11, the return of the invention.

Example 11. "Chaconne," mm. 248-252[51]
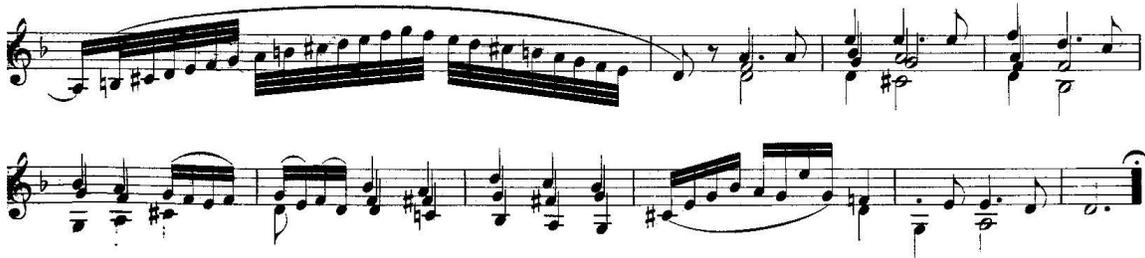
In m. 253, the B-flat major first inversion triad intrudes one last time, allowing Bach to tonicize g minor as a dramatic, but stable, predominant chord.

The foregoing was only some of the development of just one implication from Bach's invention, the *rondeau* theme, in the "Chaconne." Each variation is a concrete instance of the abstract ostinato working out the implications Bach encoded in the opening measures. Robert Marshall's observation about Bach's instrumental works is worth quoting again: "They belong, primarily, not in a recital hall—or even in an

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[50]Bach, "Chaconne," 35.

[51]Ibid.

eighteenth-century salon or 'chamber'—but on one's own music stand. They are not so much meant to be merely 'listened' to, but to be played—and studied. In this, Bach's position in our musical life is absolutely unique."[52]

Appreciating the Abstract Show-Stopper

If one were to apply the modernist account of artistic integrity to the "Chaconne," Bach would fail. Even if one made a careful analogy between 1920 and 1720, so that modernist claims were somehow contextualized for Bach's time, there is no plausible way that Bach would meet the standard of posing an antithesis to society for the advancement of consciousness.

The analogy is not so difficult to make, especially if one restricts the term of comparison to Germany. There were massive economic shifts that marginalized large populations in the fifty years before 1720, as well as the fifty years before 1920. In the late seventeenth century, the shifts had to do with trading partners. In the late nineteenth century, the shifts had to do with industrialization. Further, during both periods, Germany was in various stages of rebuilding from war, with political instability a constant problem and civic life frequently in turmoil. Moreover, both periods saw persistent divisions over large questions of worldview—Protestant and Catholic in 1720, political left and right in 1920. Most prominently, both periods were traumatized by mass violence. There was a far greater scale to Germany's problems in 1920 relative to 1720. Religion had nowhere near the influence in 1920 that it had before. Still, one can find enough similarities between the two periods to say that Bach faced the kinds of social, economic, and intellectual strains that modernists faced.

Using this analogy, one can be generous to modernism's standard of artistic integrity. One does not have to use the ideologically burdened standards of dialectical

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[52]Marshall, *The Music of Johann Sebastian Bach*, 70.

materialists like Adorno or Greenberg. One can take the more generalized standard of a Kandinsky: the artist must move history into the new era prophetically, paying no heed to the ignorant and corrupted audience, which merely wants its comfortable illusions validated. The audience must be dragged in a cart toward purity.

Applying this standard to the "Chaconne," Bach obviously sold out. He used a ready-made form to create kitsch for an audience that wanted the effects of art, not art for its own sake. Bach served the power structure, enabling German aristocrats to cling to their status over the rising bourgeoisie by producing propaganda. Instead of exposing the absurdity of German society, Bach coddled its delusional aspirations to build a civilization based on the tastes of a dead French king. Indeed, he coaxed the populace back to its medieval pieties, its barbaric, blood-soaked faith, instead of showing the power of Enlightenment rationalism. Beyond making himself a tool of the powerful, Bach corrupted his medium with privileged theological narratives rather than liberating a universal subjectivity. By every key measurement of modernist artistic integrity, Bach was a fake.

In reality, the fraud is modernism's standard of artistic integrity. By the standards of Friedrich Schiller and G. W. F. Hegel, that the artist should unite the abstract with the particular, Bach succeeds. By the standards of Bela Bartok or Ernest Bloch, who insisted that music should grow out of the life of the people, not out of academic models, Bach succeeds again. The standard of Arnold Schoenberg, that musical ideas should aim at comprehensibility, cannot really be applied to Bach at all, since in Schoenberg's mind Bach epitomized it. Modernism, far from taking history to the next stage, was in its theoretical form an historical dead-end.

Audiences themselves, spanning nearly three centuries, have not needed any of these authorities to recognize Bach's artistry. The "Chaconne" typifies how Bach related to audiences. It has so many layers of abstraction that listeners can genuinely enter its world at any level.

The puzzling ambiguities of the ostinato and the overlapping structures of the variations will never be exhausted by listening, playing, or studying. There are simply too many details to think over, compare, and savor. As a composition alone, the kaleidoscope is hypnotic. But once it is in the hands of violinists (or pianists through Johannes Brahms and Ferruccio Busoni), the material for reflection becomes myriad as listeners compare one reading with another.

Listeners, however, may not be able or inclined to enter the piece at those levels. Bach has something for them too. He reaches them through the broad three-part form that is built on the stark contrast between D minor and major. Each section has its own emotional trajectory, and all three are scaled to please the listener's expectations—the longest first, the second half as long, and the shortest last.

Most listeners may not be aware of the form at all, yet Bach still has created the "Chaconne" to include them. They may only be aware of a dazzling succession of sounds that defy belief, with one violin sounding like two, three, or even four. They may just succumb to the dream-like state that an ostinato work creates, riding the flow of the music all the way to end. For these listeners, the work's initial appeal might just be the thrill of experiencing virtuosity—the show-stopping finale to a suite of dances.

Bach designed the "Chaconne" to refresh an audience with all these listeners. Far from being a barrier to reaching people at many levels, the abstractions of the work actually empower Bach to communicate. Artistic integrity, in Bach's standard, involves using sophisticated tools to unite many different people in a common experience—a building-block of solidarity.

CHAPTER 7

A MODEL FOR ANALYZING ABSTRACTION

J. S. Bach provides a model for edifying and challenging audiences. Artists can dispense with the view of human need and potential that dominated modernism, a view that was openly condescending and even contemptuous. Unshackled from artificial constructs of moral psychology and deterministic evolutionary schemes, artists can explore all areas of human experience with a restored compassion. It could be that, to use John Eliot Gardiner's words, the most confident and affirmative aspect of Bach's music is not in the notes, but in his appraisal of his listeners.

An artist is also free to use every kind of idiom. The modernist characterization of most art as kitsch was entirely dependent on a dialectical materialist account of society. Popular music, illustrations, most cinema, television, musicals—anything that could be tied to capitalism—was kitsch by definition. Use of these idioms was complicity in the culture industry's deceptions. If artists are not shackled to nineteenth century ideologies, they have no reason to view popular idioms as inherently debased. Indeed, because of the long and close association between the fine arts and folk culture, it becomes possible for artists to recognize the modernist category of kitsch for the historical aberration that it is. An examination of Bach's "Chaconne" shows that a popular dance can become something more profound than entertainment.

How might these insights clarify the nature of artistry?

Reference, Juxtaposition, and Composition

The account of abstraction proposed in this study primarily explains how an artist creates space for reflection. The artist starts with broad models that might be

anything from forms or genres to methodologies or belief structures about the nature of the world. Then the artist individuates the abstractions, that is, makes a particular work that combines the models into a unified whole. The artwork contains references to the abstract models, ways of calling the abstractions to mind. It places those references in juxtaposition to each other, stimulating the audience to make comparisons and build a deeper sense of the work's significance. The work composes these elements and brings them into coherence. Reference, juxtaposition, and composition are the features one can examine to reveal the depth of artistry—or to expose shallowness. Consider the features one by one.

As an artwork individuates abstractions, it confronts an audience with its need to discern one thing from another—or perhaps stimulates its ability to do so. Philosophers such as William Hazlitt and Susanne Langer, as well as psychologists like Rudolph Arnheim, viewed the mind's ability to gather particular things under broad types as a fundamental characteristic of human cognition. Individuation, not abstraction, is the way human beings show their intelligence: they can distinguish between finer characteristics. In the "Chaconne," a listener is continually presented with intricately related structures and is challenged to discern what those structures are, how they compare, and where they differ.

The way an artwork relates particularities is by laying them alongside each other for comparison—that is, by juxtaposition. Langer described how tension was a kind of "presentational abstraction," a way of juxtaposing one element against another that needs resolution—the raising of a curtain on a dark stage, or the placement of the first line on a blank canvas. Bach scholar Christoph Wolff used the term *apposition* to describe the architecture of a chaconne or passacaglia. A composer would not spin a series of variations in a stream of consciousness, but would construct the variations in juxtaposition with each other to create momentum and develop material. In Bach's "Chaconne," this kind of juxtaposition happens both at the macro level of the three-part

rondeau form, and at the micro level of the paired variations.

An artist composes all these elements, arranges them in such a way that they fit together in a pattern. Arnold Schoenberg thought of composition in linguistic terms, the development of a musical idea to make it comprehensible. Bach seems to have thought the same way, using the rhetorical tool of invention to shape his development of material. Piet Mondrian was also a composer: he sought to express the relationships between shapes and colors on canvas. He composed them by proportion, thickness of line, and so forth. Bach's "Chaconne" is a feat of compositional virtuosity in which a vast number of details are arranged with dramatic power. He used the macro-level three-part form to increase the scale of the form, and used the micro-level variations to create emotional arcs.

When evaluating an artwork, then, one asks about references from the work to external concepts, as well as references within the work to itself. One also examines how those references are juxtaposed with each other for comparison. Finally, one asks about the composition of all these elements into a coherent whole.

What follows are analyses of abstraction in four quite diverse works: an ancient furnishing described in writing (visual art), a jazz album (musical art), a fictional film with its musical score (art in which image and sound combine), and a modernist painting (art characterized as abstract). This model of analysis can open up the artistry in a variety of idioms.

Abstraction in the Tabernacle's Menorah

The ancient cultures from which Israel emerged assumed that human beings must have sacred spaces. The emotional bonds on which community depended could only be created by holy precincts, initiation into hidden realities, mediation by priestly classes, and representation by physical objects of the unseen world. The atmosphere of temples and rituals was essential to the legitimacy of a leader and the loyalty of a tribe.

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Whether the culture was Egyptian, Philistine, or Canaanite, the purpose of art was to bind people's emotional world to their community.

In this context, the designs of the tabernacle and its furnishings recorded in the Mosaic Law have seemed inadequate.[1] In fact, many scholars argued that the Exodus designs were invented later during Solomon's reign to justify his temple.[2] To be sure, the tabernacle has aesthetic elements that are contrary the prejudices of its time. To take just one example, holy places were regarded as fixed by definition, but the tabernacle was a holy place that travelled.[3] It did not enshrine a place where the Lord lived, but received his presence wherever he roved (Exod 40:34-38). Its transitory nature remained central to its design even after Israel was established in the land (2 Sam 7:1-7), and a permanent temple required explicit revelation from the Lord (1 Chr 28:9-19). If the tabernacle had been designed to impress Israelites with the sacred power of a particular spot, the design would have poor: the people could watch the tent being raised and dismantled.

The menorah exemplifies how strange the designs in Exodus were in their cultural context. Viewed as a functional lampstand, it is more elaborate than necessary. Viewed as an artwork for ritual practices, its symbolic references are hard to understand. But taken as an expression of the purposes of the tabernacle, the menorah clarifies the nature of worship as the law defined it for Israel, and embodies the biblical vision of human flourishing as only an artwork can.

In the vast literature on the menorah, one can find many restatements of what Exodus 25:31-40 and 37:17-24 describe—analyses that can be found in commentaries

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[1]Portions of this section were published previously. See Matthew Raley, "The Painter and the Tree: A Biblical Rationale for Visual Art," *Caesura: Journal of Philological and Humanistic Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 35–55.

[2]Frank Moore Cross, "The Tabernacle: A Study from an Archaeological and Historical Approach," *Biblical Archaeologist* 10, no. 3 (September 1947): 45–68.

[3]Benjamin Sommer, "Conflicting Constructions of Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle," *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 41–63.

from both Jewish and Christian scholars going back many centuries. In modern literature, there is much application of form and source criticism to the Exodus texts.[4] One can also find a large body of work focused on the menorah's significance in art history, with interest in the arch of Titus,[5] the Brescia casket,[6] the Synagogue of Dura-Europos,[7] and illuminated manuscripts.[8] However, relatively few scholars have focused on the menorah's original aesthetic properties. The physical inability to examine the tabernacle artifacts certainly hinders such an inquiry and snares it in controversy.[9] But Erwin R. Goodenough[10] and Carol L. Meyers[11] have made valuable contributions to this focus from an archaeological perspective by developing methods for studying the symbolism of artifacts.

What was the purpose of the tabernacle, and what was the function of the menorah within that purpose?

The purpose of the tabernacle was to express the Lord's presence with Israel visually, a purpose that was not only stated in the Mosaic law itself (Exod 25:1-9), but

[4]E.g., Baruch A. Levine, "The Descriptive Tabernacle Texts of the Pentateuch," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85, no. 3 (July 1, 1965): 307–18.

[5]Heinrich Strauss, "The History and Form of the Seven-Branched Candlestick of the Hasmonean Kings," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 22, nos. 1/2 (January 1, 1959): 6–16.

[6]Carolyn Joslin Watson, "The Program of the Brescia Casket," *Gesta* 20, no. 2 (January 1, 1981): 283–98.

[7]Rachel Wischnitzer, "The 'Closed Temple' Panel in the Synagogue of Dura-Europos," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91, no. 3 (July 1, 1971): 367–78; Cecil Roth, "Jewish Antecedents of Christian Art," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16, nos. 1/2 (January 1, 1953): 24–44.

[8]Pamela Willetts, "The Seven-Branched Candlestick as a Psalter Illustration," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 42 (January 1, 1979): 213–15; Joseph Gutmann, "When the Kingdom Comes, Messianic Themes in Medieval Jewish Art," *Art Journal* 27, no. 2 (December 1, 1967): 168–75.

[9]Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "The Form and Fate of the Tabernacle: Reflections on a Recent Proposal," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, 86, nos. 1/2 (July 1, 1995): 127–51.

[10]Erwin Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, 12 vols. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953).

[11]Carol Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of a Symbol from the Biblical Cult* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press for the American Schools of Oriental Research, 1976).

was reaffirmed and developed theologically in the New Testament (Heb 9:1-10). The importance of these visual expressions both for Jews and Christians cannot be overstated. In the law, the Lord informed Moses that he had filled artists with his Spirit for all the design and production for the tabernacle and the priestly service (Exod 31:1-11). The artists were not only endowed with the Spirit, but "with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship," meaning that there were theological implications inherent in the art and in the workmanship. Hebrews 9:8 echoes Exodus in ascribing the objects' symbolic content to the Holy Spirit himself. The earliest Christians met daily at the Herodian temple for worship and apostolic teaching (Acts 2:42-47), surrounded by this same visual symbolism.

The strangeness of the tabernacle against the backdrop of ancient visual culture was not due to anachronism. There are clear precedents from contemporaneous cultures for the elements of the tabernacle.[12] Still less is the strangeness due to aesthetic incompetence, or to a low priority assigned to visual artistry. Rather, the tabernacle was strange for its time because its theological and visual logic was countercultural, asserting the paradox of God's presence. First, the tabernacle asserted that God was present in all places and could be received within the territory of any people. Second, the tabernacle asserted that God's presence still had to be mediated, with only restricted access to the holiest place.

The menorah spoke to this paradox with numerous abstract references. It stood outside the veil covering the holy of holies, juxtaposed to the restricted inner chamber that held the ark of the covenant. The menorah was described in Exodus 25:31-40, and its fabrication recounted in Exodus 37:17-24. It was made of a single piece of hammered gold, and had six branches extended from a central shaft, each featuring three cups made

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[12]Carol L. Meyers, "The Elusive Temple," *Biblical Archaeologist* 45, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 36–37.

to look like almond blossoms. Its shape was like an abstract tree.[13] Its lamps were to be kept burning by the priests "from evening to morning" using pure olive oil (Exod 27:20-21; Lev 24:1-4).

Three of the many features of this design illustrate its unusual character.

First, as Meyers points out, the term קנה, which is often translated "branches" in reference to the menorah's structure, actually denotes a plant, "a gigantic grass growing to a height of eight to eighteen feet and a diameter of two to three inches at its base. It is common throughout Syria, Palestine, and the Sinai Peninsula particularly along the margins of watercourses or bodies of water." She notes that this reed is associated in Scripture with Egypt, coming to symbolize the whole nation (e.g. 2 Kgs 18:21; Isa 19:6; 36:6; Ezek 29:6-7).[14] The reed-branches of the menorah, then, are a geographical reference. They call to mind the nation of Egypt as a concept. There is good reason to read them as a reference to the story of the Exodus, a reminder of past enslavement—of where Israel came from.

Second, the menorah's plant reference is composite. The design calls for cups fashioned like almond blossoms, three of which sprout from each Egyptian reed. Scholars have noted what they take to be the odd choice of fruit for this symbol. Neither the Egyptians nor their Israelite slaves grew almonds.[15] Why call for almond blossoms on the menorah when the first Levites who cared for it would never have seen them? The common hypothesis that the Exodus designs were written centuries after Moses serves as a sufficient explanation for some.[16] From another point of view, Meyers says that some

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[13]Meyers, *Tabernacle Menorah*, 84; Leon Yarden, *The Tree of Light: A Study of the Menorah, the Seven-Branched Lampstand* (London: Horovitz, 1971), 35.

[14]Meyers, *Tabernacle Menorah*, 19.

[15]John C. Trever, "The Flora of the Bible and Biblical Scholarship," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 1959): 47.

[16]Ibid.

ancient cultures were fascinated with the almond tree because it was the first to bloom.[17] But, from the biblical context itself, the almond does appear in three places that help answer the question. In Genesis 43:11, Jacob sends almonds to the then-unknown Joseph in Egypt as a present to appease him. Almonds were likely associated with the land of Canaan just as reeds were associated with Egypt. In Numbers 17:8, Aaron's rod produces almond blossoms as a proof that he is the Lord's choice as high priest. Jeremiah 1:11-12 records a similar incident. A rod sprouts almond blossoms as a sign that the Lord watches over his word to perform it. The almond blossoms on the menorah, then, are at least another geographical reference, and probably refer to the larger concept of the Lord's watchful performance of his word for Israel in its destination, the land. Further, these blossoms from Canaan juxtaposed to with the Egyptian reeds refer to the story of Israel again.

Third, there is a marked shift in concept in the menorah from similar lampstands in contemporaneous cultures. It has a functional purpose: to give light for the priests in a tent that has no windows. This function is typically interpreted by Christians as a Messianic type: Christ will give light just as the menorah does.[18] While this focus is an important part of the menorah's symbolism, Meyers argues that the menorah's overall design—the reed and blossom references with many other aspects—raises it to an artistic symbol. "Actually, it is not so much the actual detail of the decoration, such as the use of a triple floral form, which strikes us as most important. Rather it is the shift in conception of the stand from a simple and functional device to an object which assumes architectonic elements and thereby becomes important in and of itself."[19] Furthermore, as an artistic expression, it cannot be understood as a product of the cultures around Israel at the time.

[17]Meyers, *Tabernacle Menorah*, 23.

[18]*John Owen, "The Branch of the Lord the Beauty of Zion," in Sermons to the Nation, The Works of John Owen*, vol. 8 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 295–97.

[19]Meyers, *Tabernacle Menorah*, 83.

"Nothing in the realm of stands, cultic or otherwise, can be related to the branched form of the menorah."[20]

These three features, together with the overall design of the tabernacle, make clear that the menorah was a unique artistic statement in the ancient world. Considering the layers of scriptural allusion in the menorah, it embodied the countercultural mission of the tabernacle. The larger biblical narrative is harnessed to the menorah's design.

The tabernacle was where the Lord dwelt with human beings, like the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:4-3:24). The tree of life was the focus of the garden as the created source of renewed life, and it was from this tree particularly that human beings were exiled. For Christians, the reappearance of the tree of life in the New Jerusalem closes the story of redemption, with human beings restored to God's dwelling place (Rev 22:1-5). In this context, the menorah as a tree within God's dwelling yet outside the holy of holies is a natural, even necessary, furnishing. It expresses the problem of separation from God, promises the blessing of God across that separation, and anticipates the ultimate reunification of human beings with God.

Another connection with biblical narrative is the menorah's references to Israel's point of origin, Egypt (the reed-branches), and to Israel's destination, the land of Canaan (almond blossoms). Its mixture of plant references might have several purposes. It seems to portray the emergence of Israel out of Egypt like almond blossoms out of reeds. It also seems to recall the Lord's promise that Israel's new land will be fruitful. Meyers comments on the theology behind this design, in contrast to the prevailing concepts in ancient cultures: "There is no question but that the Lord is the divine power behind the flourishing or non-flourishing of vegetation, and there is no appeal to any natural aspect of God's being as a force to be confronted or dealt with in order to secure

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[20]Meyers, *Tabernacle Menorah*, 84; Charles D. Isbell, untitled article, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 39, no. 3 (July 1, 1980): 221; William Propp, *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 512.

fertility. In other words, God has been completely separated from nature."[21] In whatever way one reads the composite design, the menorah brings the narrative of the Lord's loyal love upon Israel and its land into the tabernacle.

Still another abstract reference to biblical narrative can be found in the image of the tree itself, a motif that describes the Lord's redemptive work for Israel both before and after the menorah was made. The song at the Red Sea closes with the picture of the Lord planting Israel on his mountain (Exod 15:17). The Lord promises David that he will "plant" Israel securely (2 Sam 7:10; 1 Chr 17:9). The image of Israel as a vine or tree planted by the Lord recurs in Psalm 80:9-11 and Isaiah 61:3, *et al*. Meyers believes that the menorah is a symbol of the planted nation, and that it "can be seen as the ultimate challenge to the pagan fertility and immortality themes."[22] Human flourishing comes from the Lord, not Baal, Asherah, or any other deity.

The menorah, then, gleams in the Lord's presence to represent the fruitfulness and security of the nation, the entire scope of the people's life symbolized as God-focused witness and worship. It is not possible to see how the tabernacle menorah was composed as a whole, since the object was lost long ago. How did the juxtapositions of the reeds with the blossoms, of the menorah with the veil of the holy of holies, and with all the other furnishings of the tabernacle actually work together to make a coherent whole? What was the effect of the tree with all of its individuated qualities? No one can answer these questions. But the countercultural significance of the menorah becomes clear by examining its abstract references.

It is also possible to understand the power that the menorah still holds as a symbol. The object was at the center of events that have been told and retold in every generation of Jews and Christians. More than that, the original was designed with depth.

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[21]Meyers, *Tabernacle Menorah*, 135.

[22]Ibid., 156.

So it gave rise to a national tradition of menorah making that recalled the nation's origin, and to some extent framed Jewish identity in later experiences.

Abstraction in Roach's *Freedom Now Suite*

Adlai Stevenson, twice the Democratic party's nominee for president, had just assumed his post as ambassador to the United Nations under President John F. Kennedy. He took the podium at the United Nations on February 15, 1961, to defend the Security Council's actions in Congo, where crisis the previous autumn had led to the execution of ousted Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba. As Stevenson began to speak, between 50 and 60 African American protestors stood in the gallery, dressed in black. Security personnel tried to end the demonstration and were resisted by the protestors. Among them were activist Daniel Watts, poets Maya Angelou and LeRoi Jones, singer Abbey Lincoln, and jazz percussionist Max Roach (1924-2007).[23] Roach had just recorded his now-famous album with Lincoln, *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite*, a sweeping musical narrative of the experiences of the African diaspora from slavery in the United States, to emancipation, to the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa. Africa's fight against colonialism would become increasingly important to Roach, even moving him in May of 1961 to walk onstage with a picket sign to protest the involvement of a fellow musician in the Africa Relief Foundation, which Roach believed was perpetuating colonialism. The musician Roach interrupted was Miles Davis.[24]

Musically, Roach was one of the originators of bebop, playing with Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Davis, among others. This new style of jazz was seen as avant-garde, and the musicians who developed it were paying attention to modernist

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[23]Njoroge Njoroge, "Dedicated to the Struggle: Black Music, Transculturation, and the Aural Making and Unmaking of the Third World," *Black Music Research Journal* 28, no. 2 (October 1, 2008): 85–86.

[24]Robert K. McMichael, "'We Insist-Freedom Now!': Black Moral Authority, Jazz, and the Changeable Shape of Whiteness," *American Music* 16, no. 4 (December 1, 1998): 385.

artists and composers. Jazz musicians and modernist painters often went to the same cafés and parties in Harlem and Greenwich Village. Jackson Pollock reputedly listened to Gillespie's and Parker's recordings while he painted, and record labels adorned bebop album covers with abstract art. Saxophonist Ornette Coleman was also a painter, and his work sometimes appeared on his own album covers.[25] Composer and percussionist Jesse Stewart writes that "the musical innovations of Charlie Parker and his contemporaries constituted a trenchant form of *Afro*-modernism in which abstraction and creative mobility were two central tenets."[26] Kenny Clarke, another drummer who originated the style, said that it wasn't called "bop" in the beginning. "We called ourselves modern." Scholars such as Mark S. Harvey and Alfred Appel, Jr. place bebop within the canon of modernism. But Stewart objects that such accounts ignore the social and political uses of the music, as well as the tensions between modernism and the traditionalism that motivated Parker, Roach, and the other originators.[27] To describe the kind of modernism at work in bebop, Stewart focuses on the issue of abstraction:

> Music can be said to be representational in the sense that musicians generally draw upon certain stylistic conventions that invoke and, in effect, represent a particular musical style or tradition. Over time, musicians experiment with those conventions in response to changing musical and cultural contexts, and the relationship to prior musical codes becomes more abstract.

Some of the abstract procedures in bebop involved composing new songs on the harmonic structures of established ones. Charlie Parker's "Scrapple from the Apple" used the chords of Fats Waller's "Honeysuckle Rose" and George Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm." Bebop players also substituted the I, IV, and V chords in the blues with much more chromatic and complicated harmonies, keeping the familiar structure but filling it

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[25]Carissa Kowalski Dougherty, "The Coloring of Jazz: Race and Record Cover Design in American Jazz, 1950 to 1970," *Design Issues* 23, no. 1 (January 1, 2007): 52.

[26]Jesse Stewart, "No Boundary Line to Art: 'Bebop' as Afro-Modernist Discourse," *American Music* 29, no. 3 (November 15, 2011): 333.

[27]Ibid., 334.

with unfamiliar sounds.[28] These were not just methods for revitalizing the music. Gillespie and Clarke both said that they used such abstract techniques in clubs like Minton's to scare off lesser musicians they didn't want to jam with.[29]

The innovations of bebop were frequently misunderstood—and by more people than those discouraged horn players at Minton's. When a young student named LaRue Anderson met Roach in Los Angeles, for example, she was studying music at USC and endeavoring to prove that bebop was not a proper art form. Jazz scholar Eddie Meadows recounts, "Absent in-depth knowledge about bebop articulations, phrasing, and the use of half-step progressions, tritone substitutions, and other musical features of the style, she believed that the musicians either did not know or were deliberately breaking the rules." Once she learned how the abstract theory worked from Roach, however, she not only approved of bebop, but married Roach's colleague, trumpeter Clifford Brown, in 1954.[30]

Roach's collaboration with Brown in Los Angeles that year tells something about his musical direction. Having just signed a six-month contract with the Lighthouse, a prominent jazz club in Hermosa Beach, he invited Brown to share the billing with him at a concert in the Pasadena Civic Auditorium. The Clifford Brown-Max Roach Quintet became a powerhouse until Brown's death in a car accident in 1956. Miles Davis had initially joined Roach in Los Angeles, but returned to New York for reasons that are unclear. Davis and Roach were diverging stylistically. Soon after bebop revolutionized jazz in the late 1940s, Davis began to chart his own course toward the cool sound that became his hallmark. His improvisations explored more of the trumpet's mid- and low-range. Roach, however, wanted a hotter sound. He wanted his new quintet to be a

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[28]Stewart, "No Boundary Line to Art," 336.

[29]Ibid., 337–38.

[30]Eddie S. Meadows, "Clifford Brown in Los Angeles," *Black Music Research Journal* 31, no. 1 (May 2, 2011): 47–49.

straight-ahead bebop group, featuring a trumpeter who would complement his own rhythmic inventions with a fiery style, using standards and new compositions in an AABA form as vehicles. Brown was his man.[31]

Another indication of the musical directions Roach was taking was his interaction and African and Afro-Cuban drummers. Early in the development of bebop, players from the African diaspora were involved in Parker's, Gillespie's, and Roach's effort to reach beyond European and American music making. Roach remembered working with Afro-Cuban percussionists on 52nd Street even prior to 1946.[32] By the late-1950s this syncretism became an expression of the Third World nonaligned movement, as musicians like Roach increasingly identified with the worldwide African community.[33] In the liner notes for *Freedom Now*, Nat Hentoff wrote of this period, "Jazzmen too had been becoming conscious and prideful of the African wave of independence. Several new original compositions were titled with the names of African nations, and some jazzmen began to know more about Nkrumah than about their local Congressman."[34]

In this context, Roach saw music as a tool for social action and political resistance. In many cases, the resistance was social. For example, he described getting requests in white venues for standards. Using the technique of playing new melodies over old chord changes, the musicians would say that they were playing "How High the Moon" when in fact they were playing their own melodies. In other cases, the resistance was economic. Musicians discovered that they could use the technique of putting new melodies over old changes to circumvent paying royalties from their recordings to Cole Porter or Gershwin. "So you see," said Roach, "there were a lot of things that were going

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[31]Meadows, "Clifford Brown in Los Angeles," 52–53.

[32]Stewart, "No Boundary Line to Art," 340–41.

[33]Njoroge, "Dedicated to the Struggle," 90–91.

[34]Max Roach, *We Insist! Freedom Now Suite*, LP (New York: Candid, 1960).

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on revolutionary during that time. If you made a record, you could say, 'This is an original.'[35] Roach said that his music had an essentially social purpose:

> It is my duty, the purpose of an artist to mirror his times and its effects on his fellow man. We American jazz musicians of African descent have proven beyond all doubt that we're master musicians on our instruments. Now, what we have to do is employ our skill to tell the dramatic story of our people and what we've been through.[36]

The "Freedom Now Suite" was exactly that story. The album began as a collaboration with lyricist and singer Oscar Brown. Roach had intended it to be a choral work that would commemorate the centenary of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1962.[37] Roach and Brown, however, had different visions for the piece. For Brown, the work was to tell the story of the beat, ultimately calling humanity to be united. "So I was preaching love," he said. "Max thought that Malcolm X had a better solution than Martin Luther King." Roach, for his part, envisioned the suite as a political protest. As the two worked together over the phone, they argued about the political meanings the suite should have, and eventually broke off the collaboration. The *Freedom Now* album was a shock to Brown, who only found out that Roach was recording it when Hentoff sought material from Brown for the liner notes.[38] The recording was very much the expression of Roach's view.

By the fall of 1960, when Roach recorded the album, events in Africa had converged with the African-American experience. Television and print media had carried images of men, women, and children being shot in South Africa's Sharpeville massacre, as well as images of the growing sit-in movement in the United States. *Freedom Now* became a multi-layered set of references to all these events, starting with the album

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[35]Stewart, "No Boundary Line to Art," 339.

[36]Njoroge, "Dedicated to the Struggle," 97.

[37]Roach, *Freedom Now*.

[38]Ingrid Monson, "Revisited! The Freedom Now Suite," *JazzTimes*, September 1, 2001, accessed January 26, 2017, https://jazztimes.com/features/revisited-the-freedom-now-suite/.

cover. A large photo of a sit-in at a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina in February, 1960, where the movement started, frames a white attendant between two black men looking directly at the viewer.[39] Scholar Carissa Dougherty writes, "The bold constructivist style of typography reasserts the rebellion and urgency of the album's title, *We Insist!* and makes the cover appear almost as a newspaper front page, screaming the message of equality."[40] Thus, a suite that would refer deeply to black history on two continents was brought sharply into contemporary focus by its cover art.

The music itself offers many layers of abstract reference. Jazz scholar Ingrid Monson writes:

> Dealing with the music in jazz is often confused with simply providing a structural account of it—its keys, harmonies, rhythmic patterns, melodic styles, textures, timbres, genres and forms. The "Freedom Now Suite" offers the opportunity to think about how these musical dimensions also carry symbolic associations that are key to generating a deeper expressive power.

She notes, for example, that the suite is framed by an irregular 5/4 meter. "Driva Man" at the opening and "Tears for Johannesburg" at the end are both in that unexpected time signature. This is often interpreted as Roach's shot at Dave Brubeck's *Take Five* (1959). Many black jazzmen resented the white musician from the west coast for the attention he received while appropriating their music.[41] Protest was built into the structure of the album with every layer of abstract reference, creating a reflective space that demanded resistance.

"Driva Man" is not the simple song it appears to be, but uses abstraction to command the listener's attention. For example, Oscar Brown's lyrics put the listener in relationship to the white slave drivers on southern plantations by staying entirely within the slave's point of view. This tight focus prompts the listener to form the picture of

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[39]McMichael, "We Insist-Freedom Now!," 381.

[40]Dougherty, "The Coloring of Jazz," 54.

[41]Monson, "Revisited!"

slavery line by line, as if watching footage from a handheld camera. The reality of beatings and sexual domination become clear not by an explicit depiction, but by the singer's subjective statements, such as, "Driva Man'll make you jump," and, "Ain't but two things on my mind/ Driva man and quittin' time." Using the same method, the lyrics portray the cruelty of "paterollers," which Hentoff explained in his notes: poor whites patrolled at night hunting for escaped slaves with dogs.[42] The musical elements display even more subtle abstractions. Lincoln begins the song in C minor, accompanying herself on tambourine with an imitation of the driver's whip. The expectations set by her solo seem clear, but they are shattered by the instrumental entrance. While the tambourine whip imitation is taken over by a rim shot, maintaining continuity, the 5/4 meter becomes explicit, throwing off the listen's sense of stability. Coleman Hawkins's statement of the tune on tenor sax is reharmonized by bass line in A-flat, with dissonant chords in the horns.[43] The musical elements abstract the song from its apparently straightforward form of tune, improvisation, and return, forcing the listener to engage more consciously—the sort of subtle effect Bach creates in his "Chaconne" by denying the listener an explicit ostinato.

The juxtaposition of "Freedom Day" with "Driva Man" packs a world of perspective and atmosphere into a simple stylistic shift. Roach, in Hentoff's words, evokes "the vibrant expectancy and wonderment and nagging disbelief in the period immediately following the Emancipation Proclamation."[44] That atmosphere is clear from the beginning of the song, with a fanfare from the horns that announces liberation from the slave driver. To make the atmosphere even more palpable, Roach puts the song in an up-tempo bebop style with which contemporary listeners would instantly identify. It

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[42]Roach, *Freedom Now*.

[43]Monson, "Revisited!"

[44]Roach, *Freedom Now*.

could not be more removed from the lament of "Driva Man" and the world of the spiritual. Indeed, the shift removes "Freedom Day" even from the celebratory music of the African American church, giving the response to emancipation a secular atmosphere. This move closer to the listener's stylistic world makes the emotions surrounding emancipation more accessible, while still sending the listener back almost a century in time. A more subtle way in which "Driva Man" is juxtaposed with "Freedom Day" is the melodic motive. "Driva Man" used a simple whole step down, then back to the tonic, as the characteristic interval of its tune. "Freedom Day" uses the same whole-step motion, though the rhythm is augmented, or slowed down. With this reference, "Freedom Day" draws the pain of "Driva Man" into the celebration and provides a new context for it. It is the sort of move that the "Chaconne" makes when Bach puts the *rondeau* theme in D major. The significance of the motive is transformed. This kind of development was part of what Roach meant when he said that improvised music is "like language: you're talking, you're speaking, you're responding to yourself."[45]

"Triptych: Prayer, Protest, Peace" is a three-part song at the center of the suite that mirrors aspects of the larger form. It features only Roach and Lincoln. The outer parts again summon the spiritual, with a wordless tune in "Prayer" and a more weary, sighing return in "Peace." These sections are in E minor, Roach's drums tuned in a perfect fourth to support the tonality.[46] Juxtaposed with the two outer sections is perhaps the most controversial part of the album. "Protest" consists of Lincoln's literal screams against the background of violent outbursts from the drums. The screams are utterly removed from the normal and isolated from any context that corresponds to their intensity. Screaming in the context of a dramatic portrayal of a beating, for example,

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[45]Robert Kraut, "Why Does Jazz Matter to Aesthetic Theory?," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 9.

[46]Monson, "Revisited!"

would not have the same meaning as Lincoln's screams. Roach's drums provide the only violence that might warrant the screams, and it is far from clear whether the violence is coming upon the screamer or from her. The screaming in "Triptych" is symbolic, a response to the entire story of the African experience.

"All Africa" expands the historical horizon beyond America. The references become explicitly African through the lyrics, the languages, and the drummers. The lyrics extoll the power of "the beat" of the African drum. The sound of African languages becomes part of the music, as Lincoln sings the names of tribes from all over the continent and Nigerian drummer Michael Olantunji responds with proverbs about freedom in his native Yoruba dialect. The centerpiece of the song is a spectacular polyrhythmic drum improvisation by Roach with Olantunji on conga drums, and Afro-Cubans Raymond Mantilla and Tomas du Vall on other percussion instruments.[47] This song stands not only in juxtaposition with the portrayal of suffering in "Tryptich," asserting the long dignity and vitality of Africans, but also with the African American experience portrayed in "Driva Man" and "Freedom Day." Through abstraction and juxtaposition, the suite connects experiences across the African diaspora. The themes of black nationalism are a good analogue to the German aspirations after the Thirty Years' War. Bach was evoking a better future out of suffering through the "Chaconne."

The polyrhythms of "All Africa" carry over to "Tears for Johannesburg," forming a kind of ostinato over which a wordless memorial to victims of the Sharpeville massacre unfolds. The 5/4 meter from "Driva Man" returns. "Tears" begins with Lincoln singing five tones in B-blat minor, the building blocks of a melody. The melody, however, is not stated yet. Instrumental improvisations take over, and the melody is only stated fully at the end by horns.[48] Like "Driva Man," this song seems easily recognizable

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[47]Roach, *Freedom Now*.

[48]Monson, "Revisited!"

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in form, with its statement at the beginning, improvisations, and restatement. But the form is in fact reversed, with the melody's full presentation coming last.

The closing melody is not merely a kind of benediction, but seems to be a mirror image of "Driva Man," the other 5/4 song at the beginning, which started with a complete melodic statement. It also serves as the African answer to the brutality of the American slave driver—the massacre in Sharpeville. The opening American section, the central "Tryptich," and the closing African section, therefore, seem to make the suite into an arch form, the keystone of which is protest. As Roach said, "My music tries to say how I really feel, and I hope it mirrors in some way how black people feel in the United States."[49]

Abstraction in Hitchcock's and Herrmann's *Vertigo*

The plot of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) turns on a coincidence. Scottie Ferguson fails to save Madeleine Elster from suicidal obsession. After Madeleine falls to her death, the lovesick Scottie happens upon another woman, Judy Barton, who reminds him of Madeleine. He makes Judy over to look like her, only to discover that, in fact, she is Madeleine—the fraudulent Madeleine he loved. The happenstance of seeing Judy enables him to solve the murder of the real Mrs. Elster. In outline the scenario seems, to say the least, contrived.

This apparent weakness has not kept the film from being held in high regard. *Vertigo*'s following has only increased since its re-release in 1983 and restoration in 1996. Bernard Herrmann's score is part in the film's hold on audiences. His modular and abstract music, juxtaposed with Hitchcock's visual formalism, helps create meaning for the audience and makes emotional impacts fueled by the logic of the story, not merely by transient atmospherics. In fact, if Herrmann's score is included as a co-narrator with

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[49]David Borgo, "Negotiating Freedom: Values and Practices in Contemporary Improvised Music," *Black Music Research Journal* 22, no. 2 (October 1, 2002): 172.

Hitchcock's camera, the plot is not as contrived as it may appear. Analyzing the manifold layers of abstraction between eye and ear is the key to finding the story's logic. On the way, it also demonstrates how abstraction plays a powerful role in popular idioms.

Vertigo offers many kinds of visual abstraction. Hitchcock's layered *mise-en-scène* informs plot development and characterization through placement within the frame. Sometimes these placements make references within the film. The point of view shot in which Scottie sees Midge's parody of the Carlotta portrait next to Midge herself is one instance. *Mise-en-scène* can also refer to iconic images. One critic, for example, argues that Hitchcock's portrayal of Madeleine in the bay refers to the Pre-Raphaelite *Ophelia* (1852) by John Everett Millais.[50]

The plot of the film can refer back upon itself, and not just by foreshadowing an event. Hitchcock uses the recurrence of entire sequences of action, like the pursuits that end with Scottie witnessing a fatal plunge, to create what film scholar Deborah Linderman calls "a series of self-reflecting mirrors."[51] Peter Wollen uses similar terms to describe the plot.[52]

A very broad kind of abstraction in the film is at the level of design. The motif of red and green that permeates the film does not represent anything literal in the story; the colors influence the emotional atmosphere while maintaining visual coherence. The drab greens and reds in the hallway leading to Judy's hotel room can be seedy, while the red and green theme at Ernie's can communicate opulence. The famous spiral motif in the opening titles also occurs in Scottie's nightmare, in the mission tower staircase, and even in Madeleine's hair.

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[50]James M. Vest, "Reflections of Ophelia (And of 'Hamlet') in Alfred Hitchcock's 'Vertigo,'" *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 22, no. 1 (April 1, 1989): 1–9.

[51]Deborah Linderman, "The Mise-En-Abîme in Hitchcock's 'Vertigo,'" *Cinema Journal* 30, no. 4 (July 1, 1991): 52.

[52]Peter Wollen, "Compulsion: Does Vertigo, Hitchcock's Most Personal and Perverse Thriller, Show Him as a Surrealist?," *Sight and Sound.* 7, no. 4 (1997): 14–18.

Each kind of reference deepens the significance of the story's literal elements, enabling viewers to reflect on the story, explore the internal structure, and discover larger meanings. The film is not just about a dizzy cop. The spiral helps us connect vertigo with erotic obsession. The *mise-en-scène* prompts us to question the characters' relationships and motives more deeply. A simple filter can lift an image out of the prosaic and invite a second look, a thinking look. Juxtapositions at all levels of abstraction allow Hitchcock to make a film about erotic obsession without ever using the words—indeed, allows him to heighten the suspense of a sexual attraction that the characters, in a lifelike way, avoid acknowledging.

In particular, two frames from *Vertigo* stand out as inviting reflection. The first is the high-angle shot of the tower at San Juan Bautista after Madeleine falls. It is one of the most twisted compositions in cinema: one can scarcely find two parallel lines in the frame. Further, the shot stands out from the rest of the cinematography, which consists mostly of low-angle and eye-level shots. The few panoramic shots in the film still have their feet, as it were, on the ground, even if the ground is high. The shot of the tower does not; the camera is in the air. The second frame is juxtaposed with the first, though it appears fifty minutes later. It is another shot of the tower as if from the air, this time after Judy falls. Now Scottie stands limp, helpless on the edge. What might these two frames mean? The only way for the viewer to find answers is to reenter the reflective world of the film.

Herrmann's score adds even more layers of abstraction. The term "Wagnerian" is often used to characterize his music for *Vertigo*, and with good reason. But the variety of composers who influenced Herrmann hints at a more complex musical imagination. He was famous for loving English composers such as Edward Elgar[53] and Ralph

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[53]Bernard Herrmann, "Elgar: A Constant Source of Joy," in Edward Johnson, *Bernard Herrmann: Hollywood's Music-Dramatist*, Bibliographical Series 6 (Rickmansworth, UK: Triad Press, 1977), 29–31.

Vaughan Williams.[54] *Vertigo*'s frequent similarity to music by Claude Debussy is mentioned by critics.[55] Less well-known is that Herrmann studied Hector Berlioz's *Treatise on Orchestration* when he was thirteen years old. The Romantic maverick's influence on Herrmann was life-long.[56] Nor was Berlioz the only musical outsider with whom Herrmann identified. Though Herrmann spent his student years in New York close to such American icons as Aaron Copland and George Gershwin, he also developed relationships with young radical composers in a group modeled on *Les Six*. Most significantly, Steven Smith documents Herrmann's long association with Charles Ives, the ultimate outsider. Herrmann studied Ives's *114 Songs* early in life, and habitually visited the old composer until Ives's death in 1954.[57]

With such a background, there should be no surprise that Herrmann's score is one of the more abstract elements of *Vertigo*. It is not explicitly tonal—that is, the harmonies are not organized around a triad that specifies a key, but around the pitch-class structures and intervallic relationships that occur in the first bars of the prelude. Herrmann, further, employs a modular phrase structure that permits the extension of a line, but is not intrinsically melodic, alluding to but not identical with the traditional eight- or sixteen-bar phrase. Moreover, Herrmann blurs the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic music at various points in the score. The abstraction of *Vertigo*'s music allows it to operate with subtlety, concision, and force.

One abstraction Herrmann uses is a type already considered at length in this

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[54]Bernard Herrmann, "Vaughan Williams's London Symphony," *The Musical Times* 100, no. 1391 (1959): 24.

[55]William H. Rosar, "Bernard Herrmann: The Beethoven of Film Music?," *The Journal of Film Music* 1, no. 2 (2003): 137; Royal S. Brown, "Herrmann, Hitchcock, and the Music of the Irrational," *Cinema Journal* 21, no. 2 (April 1, 1982): 20.

[56]Steven C. Smith, *A Heart at Fire's Center: The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 14–15.

[57]Ibid., 21–23, 38–39.

study, the reference to, or imitation of, established forms. For example, Herrmann employs a habanera rhythm in relation to Carlotta. The habanera was a Cuban dance that made its way to Spain in the nineteenth century and became famous through Georges Bizet's *Carmen*. As a cultural artifact, the dance is associated not just with Hispanic atmosphere but also with seduction. Herrmann also uses ecclesiastical forms in his cues at Mission Dolores. Both references, which scholar David Cooper calls "extraopus intertextuality,"[58] remain distant from their antecedents. They are not literal. No one dances a real habanera during a café floor show. Scottie doesn't pass an organist on his way to the graveyard. By remaining abstract, these references allow one's imagination to play at a less conscious level, and with ironic implications.

There are deeper abstractions. Herrmann's use of intervallic relationships is a useful starting-point for discovering his harmonic language. For Herrmann, as for Schoenberg, common practice harmony is a kind of literal reference point. The tonic triad is natural, familiar, and even rational. Following the lead of Debussy and many others, Herrmann frequently removes one interval in the triad from the whole, keeping a reference to common practice harmony, but stripping it of context.

The interval in question is called the "third," which can be in the major (brighter) mode, or the minor (darker) mode. A triad is made of two thirds. The C major triad, for example, is (spelled from the lowest note) C-E-G. The C-E third is the interval that sets the triad in the major mode. An important ambiguity, however, is that the other third, E-G, is minor. In a C minor triad, the reverse is true. The mode-setting interval is the minor third on the bottom, C-E-flat. The upper third, E-flat-G, is major. Film music scholar Royal Brown points out that this ambiguity was exploited by Ludwig van Beethoven in the iconic opening to his *Symphony No. 5 in C minor*: G-G-G-E-flat. This

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[58]David Cooper, *Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo: A Film Score Handbook*, Film Score Guides (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 65.

notoriously minor piece starts with a major third.[59]

The ambiguous third, removed from the context of tonality, is the foundation for the harmonies of *Vertigo*. Herrmann's score sounds as though it should resolve, but is dislocated at a deep structural level. What Brown labels the "Hitchcock chord," consisting of "a minor major-seventh in which there are two major thirds and one minor,"[60] is the opening harmony of the *Vertigo* prelude: E-flat-G-flat-B-flat-D. The quarter-note triplets that begin the film never find a tonal center. In another instance of this kind of harmony, Scottie tails Madeleine through San Francisco accompanied by the jarring pair of major thirds that constitute a French[6] chord—for example, B-flat-D-E-A-flat (or G-sharp).[61] These augmented-sixth chords change while Scottie drives, but they do not resolve. (Cooper prefers to say that such a structure in *Vertigo* is the equivalent of an augmented sixth chord, but does not function as such, and this description is more theoretically precise.)[62] Still another example is what Tom Schneller labels the "vertigo" chord, which synchronizes with Hitchcock's track-and-zoom camera move.[63] The chord is the "Hitchcock chord" from the opening titles, with the addition of a major and a minor third: E-flat-G-flat-B-flat-D-F-sharp-A. The film's only sonic resolution for this chord is the clanking of a body on roof tiles.

Many commentators remark on the most famous example of Herrmann's harmony of dislocated thirds, the "Tristan" chord (F-G-sharp-B-D-sharp), which Herrmann employs when Madeleine is asleep in Scottie's apartment.[64] He quotes the

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[59]Brown, "Herrmann, Hitchcock, and the Music of the Irrational," 19–20.

[60]Ibid., 20.

[61]Antony John, "'The Moment That I Dreaded and Hoped For': Ambivalence and Order in Bernard Herrmann's Score for Vertigo," *The Musical Quarterly.* 85, no. 3 (2001): 519–21.

[62]Cooper, *Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo*, 88–89.

[63]Tom Schneller, "Death and Love: Bernard Herrmann's Score for Vertigo," *Cuadernos de Musica* 1, no. 2 (September 2005): 189–200.

[64]Cooper, *Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo*, 105; John, "The Moment That I Dreaded," 525–28.

chord directly from Richard Wagner's *Prelude* to *Tristan und Isolde*, another story of love and death. Herrmann can quote the "Tristan" chord without any stylistic jolt because of the chord's affinity to the harmony of thirds he has already established. He strengthens the musical world he has designed, and adds a layer of intertextual reference in the bargain.

The harmonic world of *Vertigo*, then, is related to common practice harmony, but abstracted from it. Herrmann employs Western music's most easily identified and most ambiguous interval, the third, to construct sounds that are at once coherent with each other and dislocated.

Using these compositional techniques for a 1958 film would be advanced enough. But Herrmann employs other musical abstractions.

Throughout his career, Herrmann kept his distance from melody. This is not to say that he disliked melody, only that he did not embrace traditional melodic structure in his film scores. For Herrmann, the timing required to integrate musical and visual editing demanded more flexibility than melodies have. He told Brown, "You know, the reason I don't like this tune business is that a tune has to have eight or sixteen bars, which limits you as a composer. Once you start, you've got to finish—eight or sixteen bars."[65]

To gain the needed flexibility, film music theorist William Rosar says that "at some point toward 1950 [Herrmann] consciously adopted a structural formula that superficially resembles the common eight-bar phrase . . . ." Herrmann's structure, however, came two bars at a time, a single-bar statement often paired with a contrasting bar, with the pair then being repeated. These two-bar statements could be extended as needed, often presenting an eight-bar structure.[66] Rosar comments that this construction

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[65]Royal Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 291–92.

[66]Rosar, "Bernard Herrmann," 136–37.

made an editor's task far simpler. "Bars could either be cut or repeated and the music would still maintain a sense of structural integrity because of its 'vertical form,' whereas with music conceived in a more linear way, cuts or extensions would be potentially more disruptive to the sense of line."[67] *Vertigo* has many lyrical passages, some of them quite extended. Herrmann's talent was so organic that these passages sound natural, like melodies, not calculated. In fact, however, the lyricism is not melodic but sequential. This construction places the *Vertigo* score in reference to but at a distance from traditional melodic structure.

Even all of these considerations do not exhaust the abstractions that Herrmann uses in his score. There is one more, through which Herrmann the nondiegetical composer steps into *Vertigo*'s diegesis. He juxtaposes the subjective world of his score (nondiegetical music) with the objective world of the characters, namely, the music they hear on screen (diegetical). The forms of the musical design refer exclusively to each other.

A bit of *Vertigo*'s diegetical music would be the inclusion of classical music in Midge's apartment close to the beginning of the film, a valuable way to signal a change of atmosphere from the harrowing roof-top pursuit that leaves Scottie dangling from a gutter. The music works alongside the apartment's warm interior colors, the bright afternoon on Russian Hill, and the playful visual of Scottie trying to balance his cane. The music coming from Midge's phonograph—thin, soft, and reassuring—is part of a literal portrayal of a comfortable, late-afternoon conversation.

Herrmann creates an interaction between this diegetical cue (music coming from a source within the story world) and the previous nondiegetical cue (music the audience hears but the characters don't) during the roof-top chase. Cooper notes that Herrmann has juxtaposed the two scenes "seamlessly:" the pursuit scene ends on a low C,

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[67]Rosar, "Bernard Herrmann," 138.

and the movement from J. C. Bach's *Sinfonia Op. 9, No. 2*, which plays in Midge's apartment, is in C minor. Further, the movement's theme echoes the pitches that were played as the chase ended.[68] The score smoothly fades into the story. Film theorist Michel Chion makes the observation that music is uniquely capable of this kind of interaction. "Music can swing over from pit [nondiegetic] to screen [diegetic] at a moment's notice, without in the least throwing into question the integrity of the diegesis, as a voiceover intervening in the action would. No other auditory element can claim this privilege."[69]

Brown sees a detailed role for this moment in the overall narrative. It "carries the audience out of nightmarish irrationality . . . into a world of order" using the C minor link. "More important, however, is Scottie's rejection of [J. C. Bach's] music: shortly after peevishly telling his ex-fiancée, 'Midge, don't be so motherly. I'm not going to crack up," Scottie asks her to turn off the phonograph, which she does."[70] Music in this scene, then, helps build characterization: Scottie is rejecting the "normal" even before he meets Madeleine. Brown's view might seem tenuous if it were based on this brief dialogue alone. But he notes that, in the sanitarium, Midge makes a point of playing Mozart for Scottie, who makes no response of any kind. She turns off the phonograph again. Low strings play as Midge leaves the sanitarium—and the film. The interaction between diegetical and nondiegetical music, Brown observes, seems to juxtapose the normal and the irrational worlds. "And when we have a character such as *Vertigo*'s Scottie Ferguson who is tragically attracted to what *is not* [original emphasis], then even Mozart and Johann Christian Bach are powerless to pull him out of the world, whether love or nightmare, that is reserved for the soundtrack score."[71]

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[68]Cooper, *Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo*, 86.

[69]Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 81.

[70]Brown, "Herrmann, Hitchcock, and the Music of the Irrational," 36–37.

[71]Ibid., 37–38.

Herrmann, then, crafted a compositional aesthetic to match Hitchcock's visual formalism, especially view of how intricately Herrmann's music operates in juxtaposition to Hitchcock's imagery. Their technique is different in kind from the more typical role of a film score, that of following the visual editing closely—even slavishly. The juxtaposition combines the independent logics of sound and sight, enriching the story with deeper characterizations and vesting it with emotional power. Music relates to image, but does not mimic image.

Vertigo's first moments offer an example of how this technique works. The prelude opens with Herrmann's famous triplets, a musical imitation of the feeling of spinning not only in the triplet rhythm, but also in the figure's contrary motion, static repetition, and dissonant harmony. Compositionally, this motif sets the harmonic logic for much of the score. (Schneller calls it the "primal cell."[72]) The imagery juxtaposed with this opening music, however, does not "match." Though the triplet motif is often associated with Saul Bass's animated spirals,[73] the image that is actually simultaneous with this music is the extreme close-up of a woman's face. The camera turns this face into an abstract form, fragmenting it, draining it of color, then washing it in colors that are unnatural. To be sure, the face remains uncomfortably physical, especially the huge, moist eye reacting to things the audience cannot see. But the isolation of the face's parts, the minimal make-up, the camera's refusal to pull back and allow us to relate to the face in a larger context, all leave us wondering, "Who is this woman?" In this mismatched sound and sight, then, we are informed that the vertigo in this film is relational, the spin around a woman's hollow identity.

The meaning of this opening juxtaposition, however, is left hanging for most

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[72]Schneller, "Death and Love," 191.

[73]Kathryn Kalinak, "The Language of Music: A Brief Analysis of Vertigo," in Kay Dickinson, *Movie Music: The Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 22.

of the film. The only time Herrmann's triplets return after the titles is when Judy transforms into Madeleine at the beauty parlor. Finally, more than an hour and fifty minutes later, the opening juxtaposition returns: triplets mismatched with face. The impact doesn't need any build-up or extension. After a mere eleven seconds, the viewer's emotions are resonant with the significance of the scene even without consciously understanding why.

With this technique in mind, there is one musical issue that invites further exploration. The score has three clear harmonic resolutions in C major—highly important events for a score lacking any other traditional cadences. The first two resolutions are clear enough in their meaning: when Scottie and Madeleine kiss on the beach, and when Scottie and Judy kiss in her hotel room, the cadences match the on-screen consummation. But the third C-major resolution comes at the very end of the film, after Judy falls to her death. What does the final cadence mean? Again, in order to find answers, the viewer has to reenter the reflective world created between eye and ear.

Having analyzed some of the levels of abstraction in *Vertigo*, both in its images and its music, and having posited how these elements are controlled through juxtaposition, consider a single sequence: from the cue Herrmann marked "Madeline [sic]" to the McKittrick Hotel. These scenes lasting more than fifteen minutes contain almost no dialogue. They are narrated almost entirely by the camera and the score. The action is slow: Scottie gets his first view of Madeleine at Ernie's restaurant; he tails her through San Francisco; he loses her at the McKittrick Hotel. Camera and score, however, use the action's slow pace as a tool to build suspense.

The production of the effects track is important in this sequence. In analyzing sound production, Chion uses the phrase "materializing sound indices" to describe "details that cause us to 'feel' the material conditions of the sound source." Such a detail might tell the audience what made a sound—skin, silk, stone. It might also tell where a sound occurred—a forest, a city street, an interior noise heard from outside, or an exterior

noise heard from inside. Crunching, squeaking, rustling, or brushing can all indicate the materiality of a sound. "Materializing indices can pull the scene toward the material and concrete, or their sparsity can lead to a perception of the characters and story as ethereal, abstract and fluid."[74] The materializing sound indices in this sequence of *Vertigo* are sparse indeed. Car doors and engines are muffled. Ambient traffic sounds are few. The back door to the flower shop does not squeak. Footfalls do not reverberate. Thus, Hitchcock's sound design in this sequence removes the scenes from everyday life, and gives special prominence to the score.

It is all too easy to forget that everything from the moment Scottie first sees Madeleine to her disappearance at the McKittrick Hotel is utterly fraudulent. Madeleine's allure, the centerpiece of Gavin Elster's fabrications, overcomes Scottie's skepticism. It also seduces the audience into believing the lies afresh with every screening, rationalizing the complicity of Judy/Madeleine in murder, and desiring her love for Scottie to win in the end. We desire something of these lies to be true. This sequence pits fantasy against reality, vibrant subjectivity against the dreary formulas of daily life.

After twelve minutes of silence from the score (with only a fifteen-second interruption), Herrmann's muted string section stirs as the camera pans across Ernie's red dining room toward Madeleine, the strings playing with the cool, narrow vibrato Herrmann required. The ambient sounds of low voices and silver clinking against china all fade as the violins' thirteen-and-a-half-bar line unfolds in Herrmann's typical two-bar sequences. The motif from this line will recur throughout Madeleine's "wanderings" to the flower shop, Mission Dolores, and the Palace of the Legion of Honor. The visual editing shows Scottie repeatedly looking at Madeleine, then turning away, consistent with his reluctance to get mixed up in Elster's problem. The audience, however, is free to stare at her.

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[74]Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 114.

The camera lingers on Scottie's face as he sits at Ernie's bar. The scene will fade into a shot of Scottie in his car waiting for Madeleine to emerge from the Brocklebank Apartments. Behind Scottie, in the distance, will be the spires of a church.

As the scene fades, a new musical motif begins in the clarinets: a slow, syncopated ostinato using the Fr^6 harmonies described above. This "cha-cha-cha" rhythm from a Cuban dance unrelentingly propels the ensuing scenes.[75] Above the ostinato, repeated in two-measure modules, the Madeleine motif heard during the scene at Ernie's floats through rising harmonic changes, making increasingly agonized leaps as Scottie in his car turns from one street to the next behind hers. The score is providing more than a suspense device. The duet between these two motifs, in masculine and feminine registers, imitates one character tailing the other, but more importantly yields emotional information that the camera cannot quite convey: Scottie is hooked at Ernie's. In this pivotal development of the plot, the camera is well behind the score.

Herrmann maintains continuity and heightens suspense as Madeleine stops in an alley. The ostinato gets reassigned to plucked strings and shortened to two-beat repetitions, while the Madeleine motif briefly disappears. (The economy of this kind of change is but one facet of Herrmann's artistry.) Coming to the end of a dark passage, Scottie opens a door to reveal a dazzling profusion of flowers, with the grey and white Madeleine at the center. Six bars from the music heard at Ernie's now recur two octaves higher,[76] concurrent with the shot of Madeleine in a mirror juxtaposed with Scottie staring at her from behind the door. He is mesmerized by the fantasy.

The ostinato returns when Scottie waits for Madeleine to reappear in the alley.

As the characters approach Mission Dolores, the ostinato and Madeleine motifs disappear, replaced by a sigh motif in the violins. The harmony of this new idea echoes

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[75]Jack Sullivan, *Hitchcock's Music* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 230.

[76]Cooper, *Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo*, 93.

the Dorian church mode and Gregorian chant, specifically the "Dies Irae" from the Latin mass for the dead, a chant tune famously quoted by composers such as Herrmann's early inspiration, Berlioz.[77] In this way, the score prepares the audience for a big shift in the *mise-en-scéne*. What had been part of the background at the start of this sequence when Scottie got hooked by Madeleine, a church, is about to dominate the screen. Here again, the camera is behind the score. The quasi-sacerdotal music does not start when the mission appears on screen, but before, mismatched with Scottie and Madeleine driving.

A number of visual features are important to note at this moment, in the order they appear. As Scottie watches Madeleine emerge from her car, Hitchcock has placed the brown State of California historic landmark sign prominently in the frame. The Mission Dolores is a preserved place, not a living place. (Later, Scottie describes San Juan Bautista in the same terms.) As Scottie gets out of his car, a low angle shot shows him beneath the enormous, heavy edifice of the church, headed for a side door that might as well be the entrance to a crypt. Indeed, the mission is sepulchral in its whiteness. These images, juxtaposed with Herrmann's plainsong, descending from the violins to the basses and accompanied by a single chord on a Hammond organ, are what transport the audience into the gloom of the church interior.

The moment Scottie crosses the threshold, Herrmann changes the music radically. We leave the sound-world of intensifying desire, the wordless expression of Scottie's subjectivity, and collide with the formulaic. Like his move from the nightmare rooftop chase to Midge's apartment, Herrmann switches to recognizable music, this time not from a phonograph but from a solo pipe organ. The materializing sound indices place us inside the resonant space of the sanctuary. The music, composed by Herrmann for this cue, is a set of sequences derived from the same motif as the "chant," starting on the pitches E-C-D-E and working down by step to an A minor cadence just as Scottie reaches

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[77]Cooper, *Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo*, 95.

the exit. The cue, from the unimaginative repetition of the motif all the way down, to the clichéd suspensions in the organ's middle voice, to the predictable cadential figures, simply could not be more routine.

Is the organ cue diegetical? Is there an unseen organist in a tweed jacket practicing his circle of fifths for nobody in particular, oblivious to Madeleine and Scottie? Or is this merely a continuation of the nondiegetical score, a comment from the orchestra pit? Hitchcock and Herrmann leave it ambiguous. If the organ is being presented as played in the church, its sound, like Midge's phonograph, has been incorporated seamlessly into the score's narration.

The significance of all these elements seems clear. Church is a place of death in many senses. It is where human remains are kept. It is a museum of artifacts. It is also where dead formulas are preserved, whether artistic or moral. And it is the moral formulas that particularly seem to brood over Scottie's deepening obsession with a woman who is (he believes) married. There is no subjectivity in all this death.

The graveyard offers a kind of paradise, a reunion with fantasy on the other side. The score again offers the duet between the masculine low register, now very low, and the feminine high register. The Madeleine motif from Ernie's recurs even higher than it did in the flower shop—in fact, three octaves above the murmuring bass clarinets. (Another echo of Berlioz.[78]) This recurrence of the Madeleine motif is also longer than the previous two statements, and much less harmonically secure even than the modulations of the car journeys. This is some of Herrmann's most spare writing, using only doubled thirds in the violins, apparently worlds away about the fifths below. This is a synchronization of score and screen, the thin orchestrational and harmonic texture being the perfect counterpart to the fog filter.

Scottie's discovery of the name of Carlotta Valdes on the tombstone Madeleine

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[78]Cooper, *Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo*, 97.

visited, punctuated by the ringing of the mission bell, sends the pursuit in a new direction. As Scottie tails Madeleine to the Palace of the Legion of Honor, the habanera rhythm begins. As noted above, the cultural freight carried by this rhythm is at least ethnic, and may also be erotic.[79] More significant to *Vertigo*'s narrative is the connection between the "cha-cha" ostinato from earlier car-tailing scenes and the new habanera ostinato. Both are, of course, Latin-American in origin. But in Herrmann's score, the habanera is slower in tempo. The already slow action slows even more, to the sounds of cold flutes and harp. While the camera documents Madeleine's identifications with Carlotta, Scottie's heightening obsession continues to duet with a still slower, more loosely derived Madeleine motif in the score. This is a time-expanding fantasy.

At Madeleine's last stop, the McKittrick Hotel, Scottie emerges from his car yet again, watching Madeleine remove her jacket in an upstairs room. And again, a church looms behind and above him in the brooding splendor of its gothic revival formulas. The timbre of the score shifts from the ghostly harp and winds to the severe muted trumpets and trombones, which rearticulate the pitches of the mission organ (E-C-D-E) as Scottie enters Madeleine's room to find it empty: the sound of judgment.

The cold facts of the plot tell us what these scenes mean. They are filled with transgression. Scottie desires a woman he believes to be another man's wife, a woman whom he will later take to his apartment and undress when he thinks she has passed out. Madeleine, for her part, is not Madeleine. Judy is playing Madeleine in a drama directed by Elster to portray his wife as obsessed with Carlotta and with suicide. Judy will continue to seduce Scottie into these lies, growing more intimate with him as she does so. The real Madeleine will die, with Judy as an accessory to her murder.

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[79]For the controversy surrounding the eroticism of the habanera, see Cooper, *Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo*, 98; Royal S. Brown, "Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo: A Film Score Handbook," *Cineaste*, Summer 2002, 57–58; Tom Schneller, review of *Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo: A Film Score Handbook*, by David Cooper, *The Journal of Film Music* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 77; Robert Kosovsky, "Bernard Herrmann's Vertigo: A Film Score Handbook (review)," *Notes* 59, no. 1 (September 1, 2002): 69–71.

The actual character of Judy, then, is wicked. Yet her criminality is completely effaced by the storytelling of the camera and the score. The music narrates not the facts of the plot but Scottie's deepening subjective response to Madeleine, showing how Scottie embraces a fantasy in which he shoves aside loyalty to Elster in favor of saving Elster's wife—for himself. The music's story is the one the audience believes and longs to see consummated. And its story is told almost entirely through the juxtaposition of many levels of visual and musical abstraction.

Scholars and critics have routinely treated *Vertigo* as a love story. The murder of Madeleine Elster often becomes a sideshow in these readings, even a distraction. Scottie becomes the madman who either suffers the second tragic loss of the woman he loves or alternatively takes vengeance on Judy for usurping his love-object.[80]

Hitchcock himself constructed Vertigo to be the exact opposite. He wrote in 1956 that "an audience sitting there looking at this picture has no idea at all that this is a murder story. In fact, this film, up until the final scene, should be a strange mood love story . . . ." He called the love story "the front story, which is the one that the audience is looking at." But "the big story" was the murder of Madeleine. Scottie's discovery of Carlotta's necklace "enables him to behave like a smart detective again."[81] Thus the end of the film was the director's invitation to a second screening.

With scholars and critics, at least, Hitchcock's construct works a little too well. Beguiled by the fantasy of Scottie and Judy, many are apparently able to ignore the conspiracy to murder and the depth of guilt in which it entangles all the characters. The power of the narrative makes this distraction easy to understand. The cinematic arts plunge us into Scottie's and Judy's subjective worlds, and we are not allowed to identify

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[80]John argues the latter reading, saying that the C major cadence at the end signifies Scottie's triumph as narrative agent. He reads Judy as the voice of reason in the final tower scene. John, "The Moment That I Dreaded," 536–40.

[81]Dan Auiler, *Vertigo: The Making of a Hitchcock Classic* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), 45–46.

with the real Madeleine at all. The murder victim is as hollow an identity in the story as the woman in the titles.

If the audience, during the second screening, restores the conspiracy to its central place in the plot, willfully dissociating from the fantasy, the story becomes quite different. As Scottie makes his way down the stairs after Madeleine's murder, the audience sees that Elster's deception has been perfect. How could justice possibly be visited on the guilty? The legal formulas will not even discover the murder. The ecclesiastical formulas will accomplish nothing but the burial of the dead. The psychiatric formulas will not cure Scottie because he is not primarily suffering from an illness. He has destroyed his own conscience in the grip of lies—a moral collapse, not a purely psychological one.

The answer to this second-screening question may well be the first high-angle shot of the mission tower. This frame has the characteristics of a "God-shot." It has no footing in the diegetic landscape and is unique in the cinematography of the film. This is the point of view belonging to a hidden character. One may too quickly call the character God; it is enough to call it a force for justice, like fate. Regardless, this character does see the whole twisted picture: the impotence of the law and the church, the complicity of Judy, the guilty failure of Scottie. The agent who exposes the murder conspiracy is present in the first screening, but may not emerge clearly until a second.

In the latter half of the film, this agent is moving to expose the guilty. Scottie's seeing Judy is not a mere coincidence. Her resistance to Scottie's make-over is not symbolic of male-female erotic relationships, but a determined effort to preserve her own fantasy and protect her identity at the same time. Scottie's tirade at Judy during the second tower scene, animated though it is by jealous fury, is that of a man who finally rejects his fantasy and resumes his calling to follow justice.

In the final frame, Scottie Ferguson has seen justice accomplish its work entirely outside twisted human formulas, both upon the accessory to Madeleine's murder

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and upon himself. *Vertigo* affirms this transcendent justice with the score's final comment—the C major consummation.

Abstraction in Kandinsky's *Extended*

In 1946, Peggy Guggenheim wrote that Wassily Kandinsky "resembled a Wall Street broker." This was not the conservatism of age. Early in his career, Kandinsky had been mistaken for a lawyer, rarely used the informal "you" in any language, and could be seen in photographs painting in a suit and tie. For some scholars, his appearance signaled that he was intensely private, safeguarding self-expression for painting. He saw his paintings as an exposure of his deepest subjectivity, a baring of his soul.[82]

Kandinsky argued in his theoretical works that abstraction was a direct expression of spiritual life. In rejecting the imitation of real-life forms and of three-dimensionality, the abstract painter could show shapes, lines, points, and planes that had their being in a universal human subjectivity. But scholar Peter Selz pointed out that Kandinsky's theory of spirituality in art also worked the other way around. The kind of realism that rejected academic models of beauty and form, but portrayed real life raw, as Kandinsky saw in Henri Rousseau's painting, was also able to express the spiritual. "Great abstraction" and "great realism" were two routes to the same spiritual content.[83] The point of art was to get there.

An essential tool for expressing spiritual content directly, for Kandinsky, was his ideas about the meaning of colors. "Like his romantic predecessor [Goethe]," said Selz, "Kandinsky believed that color could directly influence the human soul." Blue retreated from the viewer and evoked the infinite, while yellow was earthly and shrill.

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[82]Betsy F. Moeller-Sally, "Inner Simmering: Unveiling the Erotic in Kandinsky," *The Russian Review* 61, no. 1 (2002): 52–53.

[83]Peter Selz, "The Aesthetic Theories of Wassily Kandinsky and Their Relationship to the Origin of Non-Objective Painting," *The Art Bulletin* 39, no. 2 (1957): 131.

White was purity and black was silence. Green, the mixture of yellow and blue, was complacent, like the bourgeoisie.[84] Taken together with Kandinsky's other "beings," like triangles, circles, and lines, an abstract painting expressed reality unhindered by the burden of visual imitation. He expected the viewer to enter into the image and explore its internal references. He wrote that "the content must never be too clear and one-dimensional: the more possibilities for fantasy and interpretation the better."[85]

Extended (1926) comes from Kandinsky's period of teaching at the epicenter of modernism, the Bauhaus. The artistic community founded by Walter Gropius was most famous for its architecture, but its influence spread over painting, photography, and crafts as well. One way to read Extended, then, would be to accept the stereotypical modernist narrative and apply it unquestioningly. The painting is "abstract" art, not "representational." Kandinsky's composition of shapes, colors, and angles is another development of his theories about the next stage of human history, another rejection of bourgeois attitudes and prejudices. Such an interpretation might reflect, at one level, how Kandinsky intended his painting to be read.

Another way to read Extended, however, would be to question the usual modernist narrative. It's reasonable to admit, for example, that modernism was more diverse, factional, and even confused about its theoretical underpinnings than later proclamations allowed. Kandinsky may have understood the impulses behind his painting better than he was able to express. Or his interpreters may have ignored some of his theoretical maxims in favor of others—the ones that fit nicely with their theories of history. These gentle doubts about modernist self-understanding gain encouragement from the fact that Kandinsky was not as committed to the term *abstract* as others would later be. So, a reading of Extended might stipulate that abstraction does play a role in the

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[84]Selz, "The Aesthetic Theories of Wassily Kandinsky," 133.

[85]Moeller-Sally, "Inner Simmering," 54.

work, but not the way abstraction is usually described. The abstractions are in the minds of the viewers, not in the painting. Kandinsky refers to those abstractions and invites viewers into the reflective space of *Extended*, in which individuated references are juxtaposed with each other in a kaleidoscopic composition. His content, as he wrote, is not "too clear and one-dimensional." He has created more than enough space for "fantasy and interpretation."

The colors in *Extended* are rich with significance, apparently dominated by the cool green background, which sets a placid, meditative mood. On closer inspection, however, the green is more of an essay in blue and yellow, with blue more pronounced in the upper right corner, and yellow in the upper left. Blue is the most prominent, with a blue circle seeming to glide from background to foreground in the upper third of the image. There is no yellow element in the composition to answer that circle, just hallows around the crescent in the upper left and around other shapes. Black is another significant color, filling the vertically oriented triangle that occupies the center of the image, several circles in the upper half, and a vertical, slender rectangle in the lower half. The rest of the colors are handled like blue and yellow, as studies in value. For example, red from the circle in the upper left corner shows up as pink, mauve, or purple elsewhere in the image. In all, the colors seem to express a heavenly, peaceful overshadowing of earthly noise.

In contrast to the serene colors, the angles in this composition seem to be frenetic, pointing in all directions. The image looks as though a machine that has been spinning is frozen in place, with all of its parts aimed haphazardly. Looking closer, however, the angles seem to answer each other in a manner that achieves balance. For example, a long, slim triangle in the middle of the image points down and to the right like the hand of a clock. Another slim shape toward the bottom points down and to the left. In the upper third of the painting, as if in reply to the shapes below, a checkerboard points up and right. There are subtle angles as well. The tall vertical triangle that occupies the center of the picture seems at first to point straight up. In fact, none of the triangle's sides

is perpendicular to the borders or even parallel to other lines in the composition. Even the point of the triangle near the top border is off-center. The angles in this image are not what they seem. The total effect of the composition, which points to "extensions" above and below, is produced by an intuitive balance of the forms as they refer to each other.

Kandinsky created a profusion of shapes in this painting. There are the circles of various sizes that refer back and forth, sometimes answering by a juxtaposition of different colors, like red and blue near the top, sometimes by a juxtaposition of the same color, like the black trio near the middle, and sometimes by layering, like the concentric circles of many colors tucked into the center. There are squares, rectangles, trapezoids, and an irregular shape that dominates the lower middle. These shapes are juxtaposed by color, by size, and by layering. The concentric circles near the center, for example, seem to be obscured by shapes in "front." Most other shapes show a kind of transparency, making it difficult to tell which is in the "foreground." An even more subtle kind of juxtaposition is the implication of shapes. The crescent in the upper left corner might be part of a larger circle. The lines that extend past the tilted checkerboard in the upper middle imply more squares. All these kinds of reference inside the image intensify the viewer's fascination. *Extended* is an explosion of individuations.

Then there are the triangles. They make an easy entry into this kaleidoscopic image, and none of its complexity overcomes their simplicity. One big triangle points up. Two little triangles point down. Anyone seeing this painting for the first time, perhaps knowing nothing about modernism, philosophy, art, or history, can be charmed by triangularity. *Extended* is not abstract. It is utterly concrete.

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CHAPTER 8

RECONCILING ARTIST AND AUDIENCE

In November of 1918, shattered by four years of war, Germany's Kaiser was replaced by a socialist government, which called new elections. Soon, defeated soldiers would return from the trenches, having endured relentless horrors only to face unemployment, hyperinflation, and shame at home. Somehow, the nation would have to replace its old certitudes with new sources of confidence.

Among the soldiers were artists, many of whom would create a revival of pre-war Expressionism. Their style featured heavy, brutal lines, flattened and distorted shapes, and mask-like faces appropriated from tribal societies in Africa and Asia. Often, these techniques accomplished what modernism did best, namely, to dramatize socio-economic tensions and the terror of war. But post-war Expressionists also reached beyond alienation and pointed to transcendence.

Otto Dix (1891-1969) had been a machine gun commander during the war. His post-war art portrayed the terror of the trenches, lingering trauma from the brutality, and the sense of defiance and shame veterans shared. He had no use for political idealism. He used woodcuts, a medium selected for its crudity and bluntness, for works like *The Streetcar* (1920), a comment on civilian life in the supposed safety of an urban setting. It looks more like a battle. The high-contrast composition is flattened, using fragmented blocks to create a night scene. An electrified trolley car hurtles past the viewer, sending showers of sparks. Apparently random letters and numbers punctuate the space around it. The car is garishly lit inside, with some of the riders half in shadow, their figures distorted and faces like masks. In *Celebrities* from the same year, a man is leaning back from his desk, formally dressed and holding a newspaper. We can read four words on the

paper: "Love, Order, Fatherland, Dada." The man appears to have four heads, but this may be the sort of device Marcel Duchamp used in *Nude Descending a Staircase*, showing many phases of motion at once. He starts with his chin propped on his hand, hair shaggy, a slight smile, his pipe between his lips, and his eyes vacant. This is "Love." As he leans back, his head changes. Now he wears an eagle helmet, and his steely eyes are fixed on the viewer, mouth straight under his bushy mustache. This is "Order." Then he becomes a statesman: bald and fat, his eyes turned upward, his mouth surrounded by a neatly trimmed beard and mustache. This is "Fatherland." Finally, he is a suffering Jesus figure, apparently with a crown of thorns. This is "Dada," the suffering poets. Such is a veteran's view of the fatuous, incoherent nature of media and its consumers, and on the warfare of German civil society.

Max Beckmann (1884-1950) had been an orderly in the war, ending up with an emotional breakdown. Peter Gay calls him "a philosopher with a paintbrush,"[1] and his circular, complex print, *Here is Intellect* (1921), is quite philosophical. At a formal dinner party, the center of attention is a dissipated old man who points to his forehead with his index finger—which might indicate his intellect or recommend suicide. The younger man next to him, with sleek hair and wearing white tie, has a sardonic expression, with squinting eyes and bared teeth. He points at the old man's heart—which, in turn, might say the intellect lies there, or might pantomime murder. A coquettish young woman peers at the drunken old man, smiles, raises her champagne flute in his honor, and seems to wave. In the foreground, with his back turned, is an out-of-place figure with shaggy hair, stubble, and a loud checked jacket. He also toasts the old man, whose right hand, we finally notice, is open-palmed under the table. It is an acidic commentary on high society, wealth, and, of course, intellect, from a man who had watched people die.

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[1]Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 127.

Paul Klee (1879-1940), the Swiss painter, sought the same sort of mystical subjectivity as Wassily Kandinsky. In Klee's print, *A Guardian Angel Serves a Small Breakfast* (1920), the angel is elegantly rendered with a series of curved, intersecting lines that lead one's eye around the image. The only color is red, hand-painted in watercolor into the frames of a small heart in the angel and a red dot under the wing. It is a spare composition, a prompt to meditate on the image itself as a kind of icon. Lyonel Feininger (1871-1956), an American who became part of the German art scene, found hope not so much in Klee's subjectivity but in the light and structure of the external world. *The Gate* (1920) seems to be about light, but the source of light is ambiguous. Is the light coming from the black sun that shines over the left side of the image? Or is it coming from the gate that should be dark, but instead is lit from within? The light, it seems, is all around. *Church in the Wood 2* is less ambiguous. In this night scene, in the midst of a dark forest, is a plain white church. Around it, beams of light point skyward.

The journey of Max Pechstein (1881-1955) toward hope crossed the alienation of the political left and landed in a quite different place. The new socialist government of Germany commissioned artists of the Novembergruppe, Pechstein included, to create colorful pictorial posters to get out the vote in the elections. For avant-garde artists, who had only created prints in small runs for elite groups, participation in a mass effort to engage the general population was new, and Pechstein threw himself into the work.[2] Broadly speaking, the effort was a failure. Most Expressionist posters were met by their purported audience with resentment—though Pechstein's were an exception.[3] Art historian Ida Rigby writes, "Many of the Expressionists' posters seem more a manifestation of the artists' alienation and personal *Angst* than a call for action; they are

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[2]Ida Katherine Rigby, "German Expressionist Political Posters 1918-1919: Art and Politics, a Failed Alliance," *Art Journal* 44, no. 1 (April 1, 1984): 34–35.

[3]Ibid., 38.

unsettling rather than inflammatory."[4]

By 1921, Pechstein was disillusioned with politics. He produced a series of woodcuts called *The Lord's Prayer*, which illustrated Martin Luther's translation of the biblical text phrase by phrase. In doing so, he was reaching beyond the alienated avant-garde, beyond political factionalism itself, to matters of larger significance to Germans. Luther's translation of the Bible famously codified the modern German language, an affirmation of the vernacular that shifted the priority from the clergy to the laity and gave a practical expression of the holiness of ordinary life. The words were instinctive to millions who had memorized them in the Shorter Catechism. Pechstein's woodcuts touched this deep chord of shared national experience at a time of intensifying trauma.

The German text, of course, was a national pathway to abstract concepts of even larger spiritual significance. Pechstein was not talking the path of Klee, who infused his images with an ahistorical spirituality that was meant to emphasize subjectivity, and he was not following the more externalized spirituality of Feininger, either. The approach Pechstein took in these woodcuts was also distinct from Kandinsky—not so much in his pictorial technique as in his spiritual references. While Kandinsky had been deeply influenced by Russian Orthodoxy, he had detached the spirituality of his paintings from any historical vantagepoint. By contrast, Pechstein summoned the significance of historic Christianity for ordinary people in *The Lord's Prayer*. The images are a call to solidarity that is both earnest and modernist.

The Expressionist techniques in these images are varied. The compositions are flattened and iconic. The title page, showing three people in prayer around a table, is composed in blocks, with no hint of perspective. The same is true of "Give us this day our daily bread," in which the table is diagonal in the frame without giving any impression of depth. Further, the images all use primitivistic devices, especially in the

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[4]Rigby, "German Expressionist Political Posters," 39.

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profusion of mask-like faces. In "Our Father, who art in heaven," God is represented with an African mask, and the distressed faces in "Deliver us from evil" are drawn in the same style. These techniques express fear and desperation ("And forgive us our debts") but serve equally well to show holiness and peace ("As we forgive our debtors").

The most powerful effect is the combination of Expressionist style and historic faith to portray the solidarity of ordinary people in prayer. Pechstein places the pictorial emphasis on the words "us" and "our." There are the already-mentioned groups of people around tables. A group cries out for forgiveness, or prays for the sick. No one is alone. Beyond the emphasis on people being together in their troubles, the people are ordinary. They are clad in peasant garb and they eat simple meals. No one in these images would be at Beckmann's dinner party, no one is sneering, and no one is alienated. Pechstein portrays the trouble of humanity with a striking absence of blame.

What Pechstein did in woodcuts—using modernist techniques to summon historic Christianity—was also done in music. Igor Stravinsky composed his *Symphony of the Psalms* (1930) using many of the same primitivistic devices he had used in the *Rite of Spring*. There are percussive hits from the piano that are unpredictable to the listener, and layers of ostinato patterns. There is a highly chromatic double fugue. But the texts are biblical and delivered in Latin. Alban Berg's *Violin Concerto* (1935) makes the same reach back into history using entirely different modernist techniques. Instead of primitivism, Berg uses a twelve-tone row to construct his harmonic language. Exploiting a whole-tone series of pitch-classes in the row, Berg inserts a chorale by J. S. Bach into the second movement.

The religious or theological convictions of Pechstein, Stravinsky, or Berg are not clear, and it would not be appropriate to read these Christian references as any sort of conversion. What is significant for this study is the fact that they recognized the need for solidarity, and that they directed their artistic tools toward that goal. Their abstract references drew the symbolism of faith into their works, both as a reach back in solidarity

with previous generations, and as a reach out in solidarity with a broader group of contemporaries. This is not to say that their modernist techniques were any easier for ordinary people outside the art world to accept. The way Pechstein rendered the Lord's Prayer may have been offensive to many Germans at first. The primitivism of Stravinsky's *Symphony* might actually have been more shocking than the *Rite of Spring* to some because it was juxtaposed with biblical texts rather than tribal rites. Berg's twelve-tone harmonies often make his quotation of Bach hard to accept for first-time listeners. It's not as though these artists suddenly reverted to broadly accepted styles.

These modernists did, however, depart from the doctrine that their duty was to pose an antithesis to their audiences. (They departed from the doctrine to whatever extent they actually believed it in the first place. As documented in Chapter 3, one can quote Theodor Adorno about Arnold Schoenberg's intentions without learning much about Schoenberg himself.) To some extent, perhaps, these artists were flipping the script on modernism, posing an antithesis to the art world. At the very least, Pechstein, Stravinsky, Berg, and others understood that they did not have to alienate themselves or their audiences in order to advance their technique. Any animus artists might have held against audiences was entirely extrinsic to their work, a bitterness that added no merit but subtracted goodwill.

This study has returned at several points to the principle that animated Bach, and Luther before him. All of life is holy, from the ordinary to the lofty, and should be mobilized to proclaim God's glory. It was this principle that drove Luther to translate the Bible into German: all the people should know the Scriptures in their own languages, not just the sacerdotal few. When they know God, they can join in glorifying him. The principle motivated Bach to compose secular music like the "Chaconne" with the same devotion he showed in a cantata. Bach regarded the people who received his music, whether princes, pastors, scholars, or burghers, as participants in glorifying God.

This principle is woven more deeply into the Judeo-Christian tradition. One

can see it operating in the relationship between the artifact described in the previous chapter, the menorah, and its three original audiences: the people of Israel, the Levites, and the Lord himself. Holiness is not merely the preserve of a few, but is a calling to the many.

In relation to the people, the menorah helped furnish a tabernacle that they only knew from the outside. They never saw the menorah in the setting described in Exodus, since they had no access to the holy place. Conceivably, they may have seen it at points in transit. But, assuming usage that conformed to the law, the menorah's function was not to grant the people access to God, nor even to be an object of their contemplation. They knew of the menorah from Moses's commands, understood it as part of the apparatus of the Lord's presence, and gave the gold from which it was made (Exod 35:4-36:7). Thus, the menorah was not the Lord's expression to the people, but the people's expression to the Lord. It was not a prompt for the people to worship—the inducement of some spiritual consciousness—but the people's act of worship. They would have regarded the menorah as their own offering through the artist, Bezalel.

In relation to the Levites, the menorah was designed for contemplation in service.[5] The artwork itself was to serve in the Lord's presence, and the Levites (specifically the Kohathites) were charged with transporting, maintaining, setting up, and dismantling it (Num 3:27-32; 4:1-15). As they handled the menorah, its layered symbolism could continually refresh their appreciation of the God they served, reminding them of his power in bringing the nation out of Egypt, his faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in giving the land to the people, and his blessing year after year in making the land fruitful. It would also exhort them that they were the pastoral stewards of the nation's worship, stewards who should teach the covenant as Moses did so that the

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[5]Carol Meyers, "Framing Aaron: Incense Altar and Lamp Oil in the Tabernacle Texts," in *Sacred History, Sacred Literature: Essays on Ancient Israel, the Bible, and Religion in Honor of R.E. Friedman on His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Shawna Dolansky (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 20–21.

people would continue to flourish before the Lord, gleaming as his light to the nations (Deut 4:5-8). The menorah daily reinforced for the Levites that the whole life of the nation was to be integrated in service to the Lord. Put differently, the menorah asserted that the most significant worship was not taking place in the shrine at all, but in the fields, on the roads, in the homes and the city gates throughout the whole land.

It should be clear from this analysis that the primary audience for this artwork was the Lord. He was the recipient of the people's offerings. The menorah stood in his presence. As a symbol of his blessing upon Israel, its foremost purpose seems to have been to reflect his pleasure in the flourishing of human beings.

The ethic of the biblical artists in Bezalel's shop, of Luther, and of Bach, therefore, carries deontological force. The artist is to serve the people in their worship of God. Broadly speaking, artistic integrity in this model is not primarily measured by personal authenticity, self-expression, or fidelity to one's own vision. Conversely, it cannot be not measured by the acceptance, approval, or delight of the audience. In this ethic, artistic integrity is measured by the cogency and skill of the artist's work in actually advancing the audience's worship of God.

Since the 1960s, some evangelical Christians have called for a profound reengagement with this ethic, and for a renewed commitment to artistry. Francis Schaeffer, Hans Rookmaaker, Calvin Seerveld, William Dyrness, and Nicholas Wolterstorff, among others, have been at the forefront of this emphasis.

One of the last things Rookmaaker wrote before his death in 1977 was a booklet called, *Art Needs No Justification*.[6] It was a plea for Christian artists to exert themselves in the pattern of the Reformation. He complained that "the really good art . . . is too far away from the people, and the arts that are popular are seen as below the level

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[6]Hans R. Rookmaaker, *Art Needs No Justification* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2010).

of acceptability."[7] This distance of art from the people, he said, needed to be closed by Christian artists.

> God gave humanity the skill to make things beautiful, to make music, to write poems, to make sculpture, to decorate things. The artistic possibilities are there to be actualized, realized by man, and to be given a concrete form. God gave this to mankind and its meaning is exactly in its givenness. It is given by God, has to be done through God, that is through the talents he gives, in obedience to him and in love for him and our fellow men, and in this way offered to him.[8]

Dyrness expresses the principle this way: "In the biblical view . . . life is viewed holistically—aesthetic and ethical (even economic) questions are constantly interrelated. Moreover, none of these important areas can be properly considered apart from their connection to the Creator and his purposes for the earth and its people."[9] The artist's role is to express this connectedness, to encourage and deepen it, and to fight for the social wholeness it requires.

Wolterstorff explains this idea in terms of the Hebrew word *shalom*, which means peace or, more specifically, wholeness.

> Aesthetic delight is a component within and a species of that joy which belongs to the shalom God has ordained as the goal of human existence, and which here already, in this broken and fallen world of ours, is to be sought and experienced. That is why you and I are to pursue aesthetic delight, for ourselves and others, along with a multitude of other goals: justice, peace, community. Since it belongs to the shalom that God intends for each of us, it becomes a matter of responsible action to help make available, to ourselves and others, the experience of aesthetic delight. It becomes a norm for action—not of course the only norm, but certainly one among others.[10]

The artist contributes to the overall well-being of society by taking action to create aesthetic delight. This is the action an artist brings to society's wholeness, in the same way that a businessperson can contribute enterprise, or a soldier can contribute

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[7]Rookmaaker, *Art Needs No Justification*, 17.

[8]Ibid., 40.

[9]William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 70.

[10]Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 169.

protection, or a lawyer can contribute advocacy.

Also using the concept of *shalom*, Seerveld said that the Christian artist's task was to "provide wholesome food for thought as well as bellies . . . with a gentleness, respect for the stranger, and with a sound, self-critical consciousness that may involve our getting hurt ourselves (1 Peter 3:13-17)."[11] Seerveld asked how the body of Christ should "respond to the crass technocratic Commercialism dominating the earth" even as the Church has participated in much of the oppression. He said that Christians "may need to learn, by more intently listening to our neighbors, how to phrase our contribution in language still somewhat strange to us." They may "need to consider the fact that artistry mediates between cultures and continues to respect the ethnic diversity more . . . than the mold of a scientific theory, which seems to weave and cut all cloth on the same logical loom."[12] He was calling for a global, diverse *shalom*, not merely a Eurocentric artistic vision.

The artistic mandate formulated in the Reformation sees human need and potential in terms of redemption. Each human being needs to be redeemed in Christ, and has the potential to participate in the redemption of others. An artist in this tradition, like Bach, serves his audience by demonstrating the power of redemption in artworks of whatever idiom. The audience in this tradition is not an undifferentiated mass— unthinking, ignorant, unconscious of its enslavement to forces beyond its control—that the artist drags behind him in a cart. Rather, the audience is full of individuals whose abstract knowledge, concrete traumas, and unrealized aspirations combine in vast diversity. In this tradition, they do not need an artist to tell them what they ought to experience, hector them about their lack of consciousness, or nag them about their

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[11]Calvin G. Seerveld, "Christian Aesthetic Bread for the World," in *Normative Aesthetics* (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2014), 145.

[12]Ibid., 163–65.

bigotry. In the artistic mandate of the Reformation, the audience needs an artist to show how their diversity is integrated into a whole—that is, an artist who will speak with potency to what they already know, and express their unity with other redeemed souls. This tradition focuses on the redemptive bond between artist and audience. Expressing the whole range of human experience is a signature of this tradition. Because their focus is redemptive, artists aim at expressing hope, comfort, and solidarity in the midst of pain—the kind of impact Pechstein achieved in *The Lord's Prayer*.

Modernism alienated audiences not because its techniques were too esoteric or its content too abstract. Modernists adopted a creed that excluded the audience from consideration in their work, stigmatized the audience's culture, and mocked the audience's intellect. Their creed made controversy a test of integrity. In reality, this creed was at war with their mission. To the extent that they really believed their audience should be dragged along behind them, they had to suspend the creed in order to paint an image or compose music that expressed a universal subjectivity—which, by definition, anyone can relate to. Thus, when modernists succeeded artistically, the power of their works protested against the animus of their creed. Modernism lacked integrity because no modernist could satisfy such contradictory demands.

This study held up Bach, the iconic Protestant artist, as a model for overcoming the alienation modernism created. The model shows that abstraction is not the barrier that keeps audiences from embracing art. The barrier is a failed philosophy of human need and potential. The modernist philosophy failed because it was ideologically rigid, artistically incoherent, and, like much of the ideological freight that burdened the twentieth century, inhumane. Many worldviews might formulate better accounts that succeed artistically. Bach's model, as argued here, is not the only one. Within historic Christianity alone, there have been many others. But without generosity toward the audience, no artist can reach the standard Bach sets—and generosity of this sort is founded on a well-articulated worldview. Bach's generosity was creedal. That is why his

music not only edified the prince of a divided house, or devotees of the violin, but also reached across centuries to mend what was broken in a traumatized boy like James Rhodes, and to comfort terrified citizens in twenty-first century Brussels and Paris. Bach accomplished the essence of the artistic mission: to incarnate emotions held in solidarity.

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ABSTRACT

ABSTRACTION IN J. S. BACH'S "CHACONNE": A MODEL
FOR RECONCILING ARTIST AND AUDIENCE TODAY

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Modernist accounts of artistic integrity often required artists to alienate audiences. In some senses, the relationship between artists and audiences never recovered, and arts organizations today struggle to overcome the hostility. The alienation had roots in two applications of Hegelian philosophy. First, modernists viewed bourgeois audiences as needing a new consciousness of their place in history. Second, artists could only bring this consciousness about by posing an antithesis to bourgeois culture, accomplished by abstraction, or removal from established aesthetic norms. In music and painting, abstraction became an important mark of seriousness, while audiences were alienated by it. J. S. Bach's "Chaconne" for solo violin offers a model for reconciling artist and audience. Bach used a well-established dance form to lead an audience through many levels of abstraction that are both pleasing and challenging. A different account of artistic integrity and a more nuanced view of abstraction can reframe the relationship between artist and audience.

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