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Finding Music's Words:

Moses und Aron and Viennese Jewish Modernism

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Introduction

In 1946, Arnold Schoenberg composed a trio for violin, viola, and cello. Schoenberg earned his reputation as the quintessential musical modernist through complex, often gargantuan pieces with expansive and closely followed musical structures. By contrast, the musical building blocks of the trio are small and the writing is fragmented. The composer Martin Boykan wrote that the trio “is marked by interpolations, interruptions, even non-sequiturs, so that at times Schoenberg seems to be poised at the edge of incoherence.”¹ Scattered throughout the piece are musical allusions to the Viennese waltz. Schoenberg only presents the waltz idea in fragments, and intertwines it with bits and pieces of the more complex, modernist compositional structures he pioneered.

The conventional interpretation of this trio is autobiographical. During the composition process Schoenberg suffered a nearly fatal heart attack and in his unpublished essay, *Mein Todesfall*, he referred to the trio as a “representation of my sickness.”² Schoenberg’s longtime assistant in Los Angeles, Leonard Stein, explained the fragmentation of musical styles in the trio by way of Schoenberg’s illness. As Walter Bailey writes, “according to Stein, Schoenberg explained the many juxtapositions of unlike material within the Trio as reflections of the delirium which the composer suffered during parts of his illness. Thus, the seemingly fragmentary nature of the Trio’s material represents the experience of time and events as perceived from a

¹ Martin Boykan, “The Schoenberg Trio: Tradition at an Apocalyptic Moment,” in *Music of My Future: The Schoenberg Quartets and Trio*, ed. Reinhold Brinkmann and Christoph Wolff (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 162.

² Joseph Auner, *A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life* (New Haven: Yale University, 2003), 313.

semiconscious or highly sedated state.”³ Schoenberg was born in Vienna in 1874, and his use of the Viennese waltz is generally understood as a signifier of comfort, safety, health, and childhood. Michael Cherlin argues that Schoenberg “uses waltz fragments throughout the Trio to create a sense of repose and equilibrium in vivid contrast to the more disruptive elements surrounding them.” In other words, the waltz is the wholesome antidote to the disruptive, fragmented modernism in the rest of the piece.

This is not an unreasonable reading, but it is not the only possibility. Instead of the Viennese waltz as an old-world antidote to Schoenberg’s delirium, one can hear the waltz as breaking down, unable to complete itself in its modernist frame. Listening this way, the relevant context moves from the month (August’s heart attack) to the year—1946. Schoenberg, a Jew, came to America in 1933 after antisemitism disguised as institutional politics forced him out of his teaching post at the Prussian Academy in Berlin. As he watched Hitler’s rise from Los Angeles, he parodied the 1914 popular song by Rudolf Sieczniski, *Wein, du Stadt meiner Träume*—Vienna, You City of My Dreams. Considering the “repose and equilibrium” some suggest for the Viennese waltz in Schoenberg’s string trio, it is worth presenting his 1939 rewrite of Sieczniski’s lyrics in full:

Vienna, Vienna only you alone,
 You should be despised by all.
 Others may possibly be forgiven,
 You will never be freed from guilt.

You should be destroyed,
 Only your shame shall endure.
 You are branded for eternity,

³ Michael Cherlin, *Schoenberg’s Musical Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 300.

For falseness and hypocrisy.⁴

The Viennese waltz of Schoenberg's string trio is not supporting the rest of the piece—it is disintegrating into it, having been rendered unsustainable.

These two competing possibilities of the Viennese waltz—as refuge or as rubble—illustrate a recurring paradox in Schoenberg's life and work, as he was caught within the unresolvable tensions of early twentieth century Europe. Schoenberg was unapologetically German, unapologetically Jewish, and unapologetically modern, in an era where the connections between these identities had begun, for most people, to fray if not sever entirely. He seemed determined to transcend the musical tradition of his birth and yet was steadfastly reverential of it.

If Schoenberg's string trio alludes to these questions, his opera *Moses und Aron* asks them directly in boldfaced type. Schoenberg worked on the opera from 1930–1932, setting it aside shortly before being forced out of Berlin. Despite posthumous speculation to the contrary, he clearly intended to finish the work at some point, but never did—there are two completed acts of text and music, with a third and final libretto drafted but no music ever written for it. *Moses und Aron* is at once a reflection of its creator and its cultural moment, and as such can help illuminate the relationship between the two. As much as Schoenberg wrote, he was not a philosopher and, apart from his views on composition, he did not document his thinking systematically. Nevertheless, he was an avid consumer of the intellectual debates surrounding him and wrestled with many of the same questions that preoccupied other German Jews of his generation. By bringing together concerns of the German canon, Jewish faith, and Viennese modernism in a way that Schoenberg himself would never have explicitly written about, *Moses*

⁴ Auner, *A Schoenberg Reader*, 283.

und Aron provides an opportunity to study the unique ways that music can address questions of tradition, religion, and language.

In a series of three chapters, I will demonstrate how Schoenberg addressed the important questions of the time that were being discussed by other Central European Jewish modernists—the nature of German-Jewish identity, the possibility of expressive language, and the potential of dialectics or development through time—through his opera, *Moses und Aron*.⁵ While these questions created diverging and often despairing answers for many thinkers, *Moses und Aron* found creative energy in their connections, with the opera’s construction suggesting a lightness and play that is at odds with the tragic nature of its ideological influences. I argue that it was Schoenberg’s deployment of a unique musical language that allowed him to see these possibilities that remained closed off for so many of his contemporaries.

* * * * *

Schoenberg’s place within his many cultural worlds is often analyzed discretely: Schoenberg’s musical style, Schoenberg the modernist, Schoenberg the Jew, and so on. In contrast, this thesis attempts to view all of Schoenberg’s intellectual, cultural, and artistic traditions as mutually defined. *Moses und Aron* can be understood as part of a specifically Jewish engagement with modernity, a particularly Viennese expansion of the German musical canon,

⁵ Throughout this thesis, I use “German” to refer to German-language and German-musical culture writ large. To the extent there is a useful distinction to be made between German nationals, Austrians, German-speaking Czechs, and others, I will try to say so explicitly. Otherwise, “German” is meant in the broadest sense.

and as part of a long line of German-Jewish compositions, always dancing with inconsistent footing over multiple identities.

Arnold Schoenberg was born in 1874 to Viennese *petit bourgeoisie* parents. His father Samuel owned a shoe shop, and his family typified the middle class Jewish lifestyle that was becoming common by this period. He was drawn to music from early childhood. Reflecting on this time years later, Schoenberg wrote that “as a child of less than nine years, I had started composing little, and later large pieces for two violins, in imitation of such music as I used to play with my teacher or with a cousin of mine. When I could play violin duets of Viotti, Pleyel and others, I imitated their style.”⁶ Imitation proved central to Schoenberg’s musical education. He had little formal training in composition, and yet understood himself as part of the German high-status musical tradition emanating from Bach, Mozart, and Haydn. More than any school, Schoenberg’s compositional education came from studying these masters.

An omnivorous creative artist, Schoenberg wrote extensively and painted well enough to have made a career on canvas rather than staff paper. Nevertheless, it was to music that Schoenberg devoted his greatest energies, and in music that he left staggering contributions. Igor Stravinsky once discussed the thesis/antithesis characterization of himself with Schoenberg, whereby in Archilocos’ fable, Schoenberg would be the hedgehog and Stravinsky the fox.⁷ The Greek tale says that “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.” In other words, Stravinsky was more diverse in compositional style and spoke to a greater variety of

⁶ Arnold Schoenberg, *Self-Portrait: A collection of articles, program notes, and letters by the composer about his own works*, ed. Nuria Schoenberg Nono (Pacific Palisades: Belmont Music Publishers, 1988), 71.

⁷ Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 107.

audiences, but Schoenberg set the frame for everyone. There are many composers who are important to twentieth century music; Schoenberg was transformative.

Moses und Aron represents this understanding of Schoenberg quite well. The opera itself has had a respectable but relatively subdued performance history—certainly nothing like Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*. And yet the “one big thing” to which Stravinsky referred—Schoenberg’s 12-tone method of composition, called serialism—is showcased here on a larger and more complex scale than in almost any of his other compositions. Indeed, this ambitious work serves as a focal point for many of the tensions that followed Schoenberg his entire life and, as Joseph Auner writes, “has come to be seen by many as Schoenberg’s principal artistic testament.”⁸ The opera is at once a personal journey and also a work that speaks more broadly to the uncertain times of its composition. It is inseparable from Schoenberg’s musical agenda, breaking new ground in atonal music and serialism, while also being central to his religious development. Having left Judaism to become a Protestant in his twenties, Schoenberg was slowly finding his way back to the faith of his birth, officially converting to Judaism in 1933, shortly after finishing *Moses und Aron*. As Schoenberg began work on the opera, he had just started teaching at the Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin, but he soon left to spend the rest of his life in America when the Nazis came to power in 1933. Although the opera’s plot comes from the Book of Exodus, it manages to engage twentieth century debates in Jewish and German culture, politics, and art.

Moses und Aron traces the Exodus story and is framed by the twin revelations of God. It opens with the scene of the Burning Bush—*The Calling of Moses*. Moses is reluctant to lead the

⁸ Joseph Auner, "Schoenberg as Moses and Aron." *The Opera Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2008): 373.

Jews; he does not trust his rhetorical abilities. God agrees to give him Aaron as his mouthpiece. Together, they lead the Jews out from under Pharaoh and to the “Mountain of Revelation.” In Act II, Moses ascends the mountain to receive God’s Ten Commandments and, in his absence, the Israelites succumb to idolatry and hedonism. Upon his return, Moses sees the Golden Calf they have built and, furious, argues with Aaron at length about the relationship between ‘idea’ and ‘image.’ Ultimately, Moses sinks to the ground in despair, unable to synthesize the two. Schoenberg never finished Act III—there was never music written, and he considered the one scene of text that survives a preliminary version. In it, Moses and Aaron continue their argument from the end of Act II. Aaron is in chains, presumably for condoning the Golden Calf, and the soldiers ask Moses if they should kill him. They do not, but upon being set free, Aaron collapses, dead. This third act is occasionally staged at the end of an opera production, but most companies choose to omit it completely.

Schoenberg was a revolutionary figure in music theory, so it is not surprising that formal analysis of Schoenberg’s relationship to tonality is one of the main frameworks in which scholars have approached *Moses und Aron*. In her book *Schoenberg and the God-Idea: The Opera Moses und Aron*, Pamela White provides a close analysis of Schoenberg’s principal tone row, identifying significant divisions and modulations. She also carefully traces the various leitmotifs throughout the work.⁹ Michael Cherlin delves deep into Schoenberg’s many row forms in his book *Schoenberg’s Musical Imagination*. As is common for works of music theory, Cherlin keeps his analysis relatively devoid of extramusical context, focusing instead on how “the internal

⁹ Pamela C. White, *Schoenberg and the God-Idea: The Opera Moses Und Aron* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985).

conflicts that inhere within its germinal tone row are played out over the whole, generating the opera's personae, their driving forces, and their conflicting needs, abilities, desires, and destinies."¹⁰

Other approaches are more psychological. These analyses often start with a connection between the composer and his character Moses. Allen Shawn writes, "Moses reminds us of Schoenberg himself, an artist who hears a 'call' that others do not and has the obligation to heed this call—paradoxically, for the very sake of those who mock him."¹¹ In contrast, Joseph Auner acknowledges Moses's importance, but argues that Schoenberg "had more of an affinity with Aron than is usually granted."¹² Ethan Haimo contends that Schoenberg's longstanding interest in numerology can be used to explain various compositional decisions around inverting his primary tone row, as well as the common claim that Schoenberg spells Aron without the second 'a' so as to avoid a 13-letter title.¹³ *Moses und Aron* is famously unfinished—Schoenberg wrote a libretto but never music for Act III—and some analyses allude to this fact. Alexander Ringer goes as far as to suggest that "his failure to compose the Third Act of *Moses und Aron* ... [is] the subconscious concomitant of his axiomatic identification with a purely spiritual idea so all-encompassing that it 'cannot and must not' be explicitly communicated."¹⁴

¹⁰ Cherlin, *Schoenberg's Musical Imagination*, 298.

¹¹ Allen Shawn, *Arnold Schoenberg's Journey* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002).

¹² Auner, "Schoenberg as Moses and Aron," 373.

¹³ Ethain Haimo, "Schoenberg, Numerology, and Moses Und Aron," *The Opera Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2008): 385-94.

¹⁴ Alexander Ringer, *Arnold Schoenberg: Composer as Jew*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 53.

Finally, scholars have sought to use *Moses und Aron* to understand Schoenberg's Judaism. However, while many historians and musicologists are interested in the question of Schoenberg's relationship to the Jewish faith, there is little consensus about how to do so. One common approach takes a somewhat reductionist view of what Jewish music is, essentially limiting it to particular intervallic and rhythmic tropes. Identifying certain pieces of music as sounding "too Jewish" has a long and powerful antisemitic heritage, with the composer Richard Wagner being the most famous proponent of such beliefs in Schoenberg's era. Nevertheless, there is a more well intentioned, if not more intellectually defensible, tradition of understanding Judaism in music through looking for specific stylistic markers. This approach is often popular in descriptions and analyses of the nineteenth century composer Felix Mendelssohn. Music critic and noted Kafka biographer Max Brod once wrote about Mendelssohn that a "Jewish tone—albeit used unconsciously—can be heard clearly, pervading the essence of the work rather than its details."¹⁵ This approach rarely works with Schoenberg, but is sometimes invoked regarding his fourth string quartet.

There is more to gain from the approach exemplified in Alexander Ringer's *Arnold Schoenberg: The Composer as Jew*, and in Pamela White's *Schoenberg and the God-Idea: The Opera Moses und Aron*.^{16, 17} These works focus less on the aural experience of the listener and instead foreground the intellectual journey of the composer. Schoenberg's music is shown to reflect his personal philosophies surrounding Judaism; the music is fundamentally a window into

¹⁵ Klára Mórica, *Jewish Identities: Nationalism, Racism, and Utopianism in Twentieth-Century Music* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), 7.

¹⁶ Ringer, *Arnold Schoenberg: Composer as Jew*.

¹⁷ White, *Schoenberg and the God-Idea: The Opera Moses Und Aron*.

its creator. This approach avoids some of the superficiality inherent in simply listening for “Jewish-sounding” fragments, but it creates its own analytical issues. In particular, there is an implication that Schoenberg was “a Jewish composer” only when he was explicitly engaging with Jewish themes. The practical result of this is that the scholarship that takes this approach focuses insularly on Schoenberg’s texts—specifically his libretto to *Moses und Aron*, the text of *Die Jakobsleiter*, and his play *Der Biblische Weg*—since all three of these texts explicitly address Jewish themes. But this is reading Schoenberg as a philosopher, not as a musician.

This thesis attempts to understand Schoenberg as an important participant within the philosophical debates of his time, but also to understand that participation as *necessarily* musical—his music is analogous to, rather than representative of, the surrounding philosophy of his era. The first chapter addresses the broader relevant trends in Jewish philosophy, coming to focus specifically on parallels between Schoenberg and the philosopher Franz Rosenzweig. It does not attempt to understand Schoenberg as a Jewish philosopher *per se*. Rather, it explores the ways in which the problems facing Jewish philosophers of Schoenberg’s generation—namely, debates about the merits of Jewish folk traditions and the disintegrating relationship to German philosophy—set up questions that Schoenberg must reckon with in his approach to composition. The second chapter has a similar goal, but focuses on questions of modernism, specifically regarding Ludwig Wittgenstein and Sigmund Freud. Chapter three switches the focus from explaining the opera to utilizing the opera as a participant in a key feature of twentieth century philosophy, namely the development of dialectics.

Chapter 1

“The greatest intellectual temptation in my life, the only one I have to fight very hard against is: to be a total Jew... I scorn my friends for tearing loose from the enticements of many nations and blindly becoming Jews again, simply Jews... Can't I still belong to all of them, as before, and nevertheless be a Jew?”

—Elias Canetti (novelist), personal diaries¹⁸

Arnold Schoenberg's skepticism of European tolerance for Jews began in the 1910s. In a letter from 1934, when the political situation had become much more grave, he reflected on this, writing:

In 1916, when I was an Austrian soldier who had joined the military with enthusiasm, I suddenly realized that the war was being conducted not merely against enemies from abroad but at least as vigorously against those at home. And the latter comprised, besides all others interested in liberal and socialist causes, the Jews. A few years later I had a nice experience in the Salzkammergut, not far from Salzburg: I was possibly one of the first Jews in Central Europe to become the victim of an actual expulsion. Those two experiences shook me awake...¹⁹

In his writings, particularly those which were autobiographical or self-assessing, Schoenberg was prone to hyperbole. The instance of expulsion he refers to here happened on holiday in 1921.

Schoenberg was nominally Protestant at the time, but was dismissed from an Aryan-only health club on account of his Jewish heritage. While hardly life-threatening, it was a transformative moment for Schoenberg, and was the beginning of the path that led to his eventual reconversion to Judaism. The following year, in a letter to the painter Wassily Kandinsky, Schoenberg wrote,

¹⁸ Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Divided Passions* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 17-18.

¹⁹ Letter to Rabbi Stephen Wise, 12 May 1934, translated by and reproduced in Ringer, *Arnold Schoenberg: The Composer As Jew*, 153.

“For I have at last learnt the lesson that has been forced upon me during this year, and I shall not ever forget it. It is that I am not a German, not a European, indeed perhaps scarcely even a human being (at least, the Europeans prefer the worst of their race to me), but I am a Jew.”²⁰

Kandinsky replies by trying to assuage Schoenberg’s fears, assuring him that the growing antisemitism—with which Kandinsky was at least complicit—would never be directed towards Schoenberg in a serious way. Schoenberg responds, a few weeks later, that this personal assurance is not good enough. “I have not yet said that for instance when I walk along the street and each person looks at me to see whether I’m a Jew or a Christian, I can’t very well tell each of them that I’m the one that Kandinsky and some others make an exception of.”²¹

The lesson Schoenberg learned on holiday—that before he is seen as a German, he is seen as a Jew—tested his own notions of identity. Like many German Jews of the modern era, Schoenberg came to see neither side of this dual identity as completely avoidable. In this chapter, I will chart the movement of German Jewish musicians and intellectuals away from their nineteenth century optimism about the compatibility of these two identities towards a reluctant inward turn in the early twentieth century. Even as they became more pessimistic, German Jews also evidenced an ever-increasing comfort with the German traditions of music and philosophy. Ironically, and tragically, Schoenberg’s generation of German Jews were simultaneously the generation most comfortable with their participation in the German tradition and the generation that witnessed their expulsion from that same canon. Franz Rosenzweig stands as a paradigmatic example of a German Jewish intellectual who sought to escape this paradox by reconstructing a

²⁰ Auner, *A Schoenberg Reader*, 168.

²¹ Auner, *A Schoenberg Reader*, 169.

Jewish identity through German philosophy. In contrast, Schoenberg used the musical modernism of serialism, his new post-tonal school of music, to situate himself, a German Jew, as both the culmination of the German musical tradition and its transcendence.

The relationship of Jews to their societies is necessarily complex, and Schoenberg's birthplace of Vienna is no exception. Carl Schorske, who revolutionized the study of Vienna—and intellectual history itself—with his book *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, considers Judaism as primarily a political identity, without tremendous effect on art or culture.²² Since his study, many scholars have expanded and diversified notions of a Viennese Jewish character. Steven Beller makes a demographic argument for the cultural importance of Viennese Jews in the same era, while Lisa Silverman investigates the ways interwar politics and culture became coded as Jewish or non-Jewish, often without regard to the participation of self-identifying Jews.^{23, 24}

These methodologies all reveal something about the process of assimilation, but also risk a common trap in this historiography, which falls too often and too easily into simply reframing, in positive terms, a Jewish character that has been created, perpetuated, and weaponized to antisemitic ends. This fault can be found throughout literature on the German-Jewish relationship, from the music of Felix Mendelssohn to the politics of Hugo von Hofmannsthal. It is, as Michael Steinberg writes, the “shared fallacy of philo-Semitic historiography and

²² Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1979).

²³ Steven Beller, *Vienna and the Jews, 1867-1938: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

²⁴ Lisa Silverman, *Becoming Austrians: Jews and Culture between the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

antisemitic historiography.”²⁵ Understanding assimilation in its Jewish philosophical context guards against this mistake by allowing Jewish figures to frame the questions and criteria.

Throughout the nineteenth century, German Jewish culture was characterized by figures such as Hermann Cohen (b.1842-1918). Cohen was a leader of orthodox neo-Kantianism, a broad movement which tried to reinvigorate Kant in the “post-Hegelian landscape.”²⁶ Cohen was very concerned with the relationship of philosophical ethics and religious thought. He argued that Judaism was foundational to the concept of universal morality because it was through monotheism that the West developed a system of universal ethics.

Cohen’s philosophical work was part of a multigenerational project, begun by Moses Mendelssohn in the eighteenth century, to argue for the fundamental compatibility of German and Jewish culture. As much as Cohen admired Kant, Kant was part of a long tradition of European dualisms that cast Judaism as a materialist, earthly foil to, in his case, the ethical and spiritual purity of German Idealism.²⁷ Cohen’s choice to ground Kantian ethics in Jewish monotheism defends the legitimacy of Jewish philosophy and, by extension, that of Jewish citizens. He fervently believed in the “kindred spirit” of German and Jewish identities.²⁸

²⁵ Steinberg quoted in Abigail Gillman, *Viennese Jewish Modernism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 19.

²⁶ Andrew Chignell and Peter Gilgen, “Review: Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy,” *Notre Dame Philosophical Reivews* (2013), url: <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/37199-neo-kantianism-in-contemporary-philosophy/>

²⁷ David Nirenburg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (W.W. Norton and Co., New York: 2013).

²⁸ Hermann Cohen, *Reason and Hope: Selections from the Jewish Writings of Hermann Cohen*, trans. Eva Jospe (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 184.

The Mendelssohn-Cohen era in philosophy framed a Jewry intent on assimilation into German culture, a project that achieved ever-increasing success through the turn of the twentieth century. Nowhere was the power of assimilation more evident than in classical music. Musical culture in the nineteenth century existed in the overlap of a peculiar venn-diagram; it was integral to the cultural identities of various Central European high classes, and was a profession unusually welcoming to Jews.²⁹ Schoenberg's birthplace, Vienna, is an example par excellence. The importance of music to Viennese identity in this period cannot be overstated. Its status as a capital of European concert music dates back all the way to the counterreformation.³⁰ However, while Vienna had for centuries been a city of aristocracy and court music, the rising middle class of the nineteenth century pulled music out of royal courts and private salons and pushed it into concert halls, opening the *Musikverein* in 1870 and the *Bösendorfer Saal* in 1872. Long known as the 'City of Music,' its role as the leading musical city in Europe became increasingly important to Viennese identity in the twentieth century.³¹

²⁹ This is a case where "German" starts to become complicated. It is simultaneously true that musical life in cities such as Berlin, Vienna, and Prague (with its significant German-speaking demographic) served as a point of local pride and community while also participating in a larger project of creating a German musical canon. This German canon subsequently became very important in conceptions of German national identity and German political nationalism. Nevertheless, local musical cultures did not conceive of themselves as merely set pieces in the larger story of German nationalism, and the veneration of German music in Vienna or Prague is not synonymous to endorsing politics in Germany. This can be seen clearly in the fact that many of the most famous names in the "German canon," such as Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms, lived at least part of their lives in Vienna. (All four of the previous examples are currently buried there.)

³⁰ Max Graf and Arthur Mendel, "The Death of a Music City: Vienna (1600-1938)" in *The Musical Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1940): 8-18.

³¹ Björn R. Tammen, The 'City of Music' in Twentieth-Century Viennese Public Art in *Acta Musicologica* 83, no. 1 (2011): 96.

The cultural legitimacy music offered was utilized by Jews in Vienna and across the Austro-Hungarian Empire to secure social capital. In particular, many upwardly mobile Jewish parents saw music as a tool of acculturation that could benefit their children. Jewish families who achieved financial success sent their children to elite German high schools where they received an education in languages, literature, and music that served as cultural insurance for newly minted Jewish members of the upper classes.³² Jews were disproportionately represented in Vienna's elite educational institutions, but even more so within the field of music performance. Through a reconstruction of student records and attendance patterns, one can estimate that between 1873 and 1909 Viennese Jews were three times more likely to study music than non-Jews.³³

Speculation abounds as to why music was the method of acculturation favored by Viennese Jews. Instrumental performance conveniently masks many details of the performer's identity—unlike theater, there is no risk of an accent when playing violin. Additionally, music of various kinds has always had a special role in Jewish culture, as its fundamentally abstract character is particularly compatible with a religion that eschews representation in all forms.³⁴ Whatever the motivations, music became the cultural currency of choice, both for lower class Jews trying to rise to elite status in one generation and for bourgeois Jews seeking legitimacy and

³² Marsha Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity* (SUNY Albany 1983), 99.

³³ Leon Botstein, "Social History and the Politics of the Aesthetic," in *Vienna: Jews in the City of Music 1870-1938*, ed. Leon Botstein and Werner Hanak (New York: Bard College and Wolke Verlag, 2004), 49.

³⁴ Judaism traditionally prohibits visual depictions of God. Similarly, although God's name exists theoretically (there are many spellings, a common transliteration is YHWH), it is never spoken aloud. Stand-in phrases (The Lord, The Holy One, etc. etc.) are used instead.

social acceptance. For much of the nineteenth century, this formula seemed to be working. From philosophy to music, Central European Jewry moved steadily towards the expressive and philosophical preferences of its host culture. In return, they were granted citizenship and growing acceptance in many circles of society. Jews became, to borrow Milan Kundera's phrase, the "intellectual cement" of a Central European artistic renaissance.³⁵

During this same period, the notion of German music as an independent, autonomous canon distinct from European music more broadly was beginning to take root. Many of the leaders of this process were of Jewish heritage, such as the composer Felix Mendelssohn and the music critic Adolf Bernhard Marx. Reclaiming J.S. Bach as a German, rather than simply European, figure was central to their effort. In 1829, Mendelssohn gave a performance of Bach's *The Passion According to St. Matthew* which became Berlin's musical event of the decade. Its reception was the culmination of over a century's worth of work establishing and promoting a German musical canon, a project for which F. Mendelssohn was an unchallenged leader. The audience included Hegel and Schleiermacher, and was even mentioned in Goethe's correspondence, although he was unable to attend.³⁶ Celia Applegate describes its importance for Marx, editor of the *Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, writing that in "knowing Bach, one would come to know oneself as German, because knowing Bach entailed understanding... not only the intellectual, inward turn in German character, but also the musical complexity that

³⁵ Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," in *New York Review of Books* 31 no. 7 (1984).

³⁶ Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn's Revival of the St. Matthew Passion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 1.

was as much a part of being German as was the German language itself.³⁷ F. Mendelssohn is a famous example of an archetype that was becoming more and more common—a German whose Jewish heritage did not keep them from musical prominence.

Cracks soon appeared. At the turn of the twentieth century, the “Dreyfus affair” accelerated an underlying unease among European Jews about their place in society. The Jewish officer Albert Dreyfus, of the French army, was falsely convicted of treason and spent close to half a decade in prison before being exonerated. His trial inspired a wave of antisemitic protests across Europe, rattling the consciousness of European Jewry. The Dreyfus Affair appeared to demonstrate that the hopeful signs of peaceful coexistence between Jews and various European states were a mirage.³⁸

The Dreyfus Affair was not the only sign of the growth of antisemitism across Europe. In 1895, one year after the Dreyfus affair, Karl Lueger won his first election to be mayor of Vienna.³⁹ Lueger often exploited the “capitalist Jew” trope; claiming already in 1887 that “the Democrats in their struggle against corruption come up against the Jews at every step.”⁴⁰ After becoming mayor, his antisemitic rhetoric only increased. The antisemitism of Lueger and others can be understood as part of a broader rejection of modernity by large numbers of German

³⁷ Applegate, *Bach in Berlin*, 119.

³⁸ Albert Lindemann, *The Jew Accused: Three Anti-Semitic Affairs (Drefus, Beilis, Frank) 1894—1915* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

³⁹ He was actually unable to assume the position until 1897 after multiple elections, because Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph refused to confirm his appointment on protest of his extreme views.

⁴⁰ Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964), 341.

artisans and workers. The economic and social chaos of the transition to modernity placed tremendous stress on German workers' conception of traditional social structures, the place and role of labor, and notions of an ethnic national versus a cosmopolitan identity. Antisemitism allowed these concerns to be blamed on the "depravity of the Jews."⁴¹ Jews became a symbol of modernity, and thus the object of blame for the economic displacement and political instability of the new era.

This antisemitism found a home in the emerging *völkisch* nationalism of German politics. The disillusionment with modernity that led to the election of Lueger fueled an embrace of German identity that rejected the traditions of *Bildung* for a more ethnically insular notion of German identity via birthright.^{42, 43} This move towards an ethnic nationalism intensified during and after the first world war, and Jews were accused of being duplicitous and traitorous, even as Jewish participation in the armed forces was at least proportional to their population, and often overrepresented.⁴⁴ In Germany specifically, the *Dolchstoßlegende*, or the myth of "backstabbing"

⁴¹ Shulamit Volkov, *The Rise of Popular Antimodernism in Germany: The Urban Master Artisans, 1873—1896*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 316.

⁴² *Bildung* is a German concept of self-enrichment through study of traditional German "high culture"—poetry, drama, philosophy, etc. In the particular ideological shift I am trying to focus on here, the idea of German identity being centered on *Bildung* makes it, in theory, available to anyone willing to work hard and revere that particular culture. This is qualitatively different than a notion of German identity based on race and/or place of birth. However, it is important to note that in practice, of course, *Bildung* was not open to anyone; wealth and class and many other factors complicate its status as an egalitarian cultural touchstone. Nevertheless, the shift away from *Bildung* towards a "German *volk*" is ideologically significant.

⁴³ Judson, "Frontiers, Islands, Forests, Stones: Mapping the Geography of a German Identity in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848-1900" in Patricia Yeager, ed., *The Geography of Identity* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1996), 382-406.

⁴⁴ Brian Crim, "'Our Most Serious Enemy': The Specter of Judeo-Bolshevism in the German Military Community, 1914–1923," in *Central European History* 44 no. 4 (2011) 624-641.

civilians insufficiently loyal to the German cause, figured centrally in right-wing conceptions of how World War I was lost.

The growth of antisemitism in Central Europe was both disheartening and threatening for Vienna's liberal Jews. European Jews were on the defensive politically and culturally across the continent. More and more, they began to agree with figures such as Theodor Herzl, who had questioned the entire project of assimilation since the turn of the century. Theodor Herzl is now remembered as the famous founder of political Zionism, but he only became so reluctantly. Initially in favor of complete Jewish assimilation, during this period he lost confidence in the viability of that solution. While in Paris covering the Dreyfus trial, he published *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State), decrying the failure of European integration despite the best of Jewish intentions: "We have honestly endeavored everywhere to merge ourselves in the social life of surrounding communities... In vain are we loyal patriots... [but] in countries where we have lived for centuries we are still cried down as strangers."⁴⁵

As Herzl did in the political sphere, many Jewish philosophers and artists of this period eventually moved away from the German-Jewish intellectual collaboration that had marked the mid-nineteenth century work of thinkers like Cohen. One approach was to mirror the move to German *völkisch* nationalism and reject their immediate, high-culture German history for an insular community inspired more by its Jewish past than its German present. An essential component of this new trend was an increased interest by Central European Jews in the rural Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. Jewish writers including Gershom Scholem, Franz

⁴⁵ Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question*, trans. Sylvie D'Avigdor 5th ed. (London: H. Pordes, 1967), 15.

Kafka, and Martin Buber began to venerate an (often romanticized) image of Eastern European Jewry. This affection for the more traditional Judaism exemplified in *shtetl*⁴⁶ life can be seen in Buber's collection of Hasidic folk tales, and indeed in the general rise of Jewish mysticism during this period.

Jewish composers also participated in this trend, but less dramatically. The most famous case is undoubtedly Gustav Mahler. Musical king of Vienna from 1897—1907, intense criticism from an antisemitic press eventually forced him out of his position as conductor of the Vienna State Opera.⁴⁷ In his first symphony, Mahler combined German folk tunes with Jewish klezmer melodies, ostensibly making the case that the turn to populism did not have to spell the end of the German-Jewish relationship. But his musical interests varied, and he called his second symphony "resurrection." The title is a reference to the recent death of Hans von Bülow, a fellow conductor whom Mahler greatly admired, but its Christian overtones are plain. Mahler is, in some ways, the ultimate Schorskeian Jew. He confronts Judaism and antisemitism politically in his life and career, but his artistic convictions are not as strongly affected.

It is hard to overstate what a dramatic break this was from the previous generation of German Jewish philosophers.⁴⁸ German Jews spent the nineteenth century defending the

⁴⁶ *Shtetl*, directly translated, means simply a village or small town. However, in popular Jewish consciousness it has taken on a unique character as a sort of time capsule in Eastern Europe of autonomous, traditional Jewish communities. This idyllic image began forming already in Buber's time and has only increased, the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* being perhaps the most famous example.

⁴⁷ K. M. Knittel, "'Ein Hypermoderner Dirigent': Mahler and Anti-Semitism in 'Fin-de-siècle' Vienna." *19th-Century Music* 18, no. 3 (1995): 257-76.

⁴⁸ Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 74.

rationality of Judaism. They made a bargain with German societies that Jews would modernize Judaism and Germans would embrace Jews. The old-fashioned, decidedly unmodern customs and ideologies of Eastern European Jews were subjects of derision in more elite Jewish circles.⁴⁹ Furthermore, there was often intra-Jewish discrimination against the “backwards” *Ostjuden*, whom Central European Jews on the cusp of acceptance saw as a threat to their social image.⁵⁰ The Eastern European Jews encountered in Vienna or Berlin—usually in possession of little money and even less German—exemplified everything German Jews had worked to leave behind. To the extent the Eastern European Jews engendered sympathy in their Western counterparts, it was only insofar as they showed the potential to become “civilized.” But by Schoenberg’s era, the new generation of twentieth century Jewish philosophers were inspired by the “primally Jewish” aspects of Hasidism and the East.⁵¹

In many ways, Schoenberg followed this move towards a more inward looking Jewish culture. Writing in reference to Wagner’s notorious antisemitism, Schoenberg insisted that “it was not the destiny of Jews to develop like Wagner desired. It was not our destiny to disappear, to meld and assimilate with Germans or any other people... We had to remain Jews.”⁵²

Schoenberg was never a Jewish philosopher, nor did he aspire to be, and so his connections to this intellectual climate are by analogy to his musical development. But even if Schoenberg

⁴⁹ Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3.

⁵⁰ Steven Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800—1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 3.

⁵¹ Martin Buber, *Hasidism and Modern Man* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1988), 19.

⁵² Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 503.

rejected Wagner's ideas about Jews, Schoenberg could not reject Wagner as a musician. Schoenberg was too deeply dependent upon German musical culture, even if he rejected its portrayal of him as a Jew. In this way, he was most analogous to the philosopher Franz Rosenzweig.

Franz Rosenzweig (b. 1886–1929) is an excellent example of someone caught within the tensions around German, Jewish, and German-Jewish philosophy at the start of the twentieth century. Rosenzweig was a former student and close confidant of Hermann Cohen, but did not always hold Cohen's enlightenment view of German-Jewish compatibility.⁵³ On the contrary, Rosenzweig also enjoyed a close intellectual and personal relationship with Martin Buber. In 1923, Rosenzweig wrote a public letter to Buber, entitled "The Builders: Concerning the Law." Among other things, Rosenzweig's letter advocated collapsing the distinction between Jewish custom and Jewish law. He wanted a fully integrated Jewish world, where religious ideas, cultural traditions, and everything in between were interwoven.⁵⁴

Rosenzweig was addressing a dual problem in the German Jewish community during the interwar period. Since Jewish emancipation a half century earlier, the assimilation of Central

⁵³ In fact, Rosenzweig is one of the primary advocates of the "late Cohen" interpretations, which argue for an alternative reading of Cohen's late work, especially *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*. Rosenzweig and others argue that Cohen had an ideological shift late in life, presumably in response to rising antisemitism, and began to walk back some of his beliefs on German–Jewish integration. Critics of this approach, such as Steven Schwarzchild, view Rosenzweig and company as "Cohen apologists," using their own amended interpretation to connect Cohen to other philosophical traditions they find appealing. It is an interesting debate, but not one that needs to be resolved here. Regardless of his thinking late in life, the overwhelming majority of Cohen's work exemplifies the kind of German–Jewish, classical liberal philosophy characteristic of his era.

⁵⁴ Franz Rosenzweig, "The Builders: Concerning the Law," in *On Jewish Learning*, ed. N. N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1955), 83.

European Jewry had only accelerated, with disproportionate representation in high status fields such as fine arts and law. The ascension of Jews into elite society was weakening their religious communities, and as this acceptance was becoming less and less reliable, neglecting to cultivate an independent Jewish community was dangerous.

The second problem, even more potent for Rosenzweig, was the changes in Judaism itself. Religious practice became more “Protestantized”—certain rituals were abandoned, and Judaism was slowly changing to fit the template of a “modern” religion.⁵⁵ What it meant to be modern, of course, was defined by German Protestants. Because so much of Judaism centers on practice, not belief, Rosenzweig worried that, if Judaism were to look exactly like Christianity and simply disagree on doctrine, something essential would be lost. “The Builders” tries to fashion a way of relating to Judaism that privileges tradition and culture as much as commandment and law. He tried to create a Judaism where the cultural heritage infused, in this case, within food recipes was held in just as high a regard as the commandments and rabbinic texts.

However, much as Schoenberg did not reject the German musical canon, Rosenzweig’s embrace of Judaism’s cultural particularity was not accompanied by a rejection of German *Bildung*. His magnum opus, *The Star of Redemption*, is acknowledged to be as much in the German philosophical tradition as it is in the Jewish one. He begins the book with his own loss of faith in German Idealism. Rosenzweig’s doctoral dissertation was a study of Hegel, and he could have easily followed in that tradition. However, he begins by noting his belief that Hegel’s work had reached a logical end, one that needed to be superseded by something that would both

⁵⁵ Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, 74.

extend and replace not only Hegel's project but the broader aims of German philosophy itself. "Centuries of philosophical labors were devoted to this disputation between knowledge and belief... It seems that reason can go no further than to place itself visibly as the innermost fact known to itself."⁵⁶ Rosenzweig then moves through a discussion of Keirkegaard and Schopenhauer to arrive at Nietzsche. Throughout this process he is reframing the philosophical questions at stake to be both personal and experiential, characterizing the Nietzschean frame as one where "man became a power over philosophy."⁵⁷

The crucial aspects of Rosenzweig's thought here are not any particular points about Hegel or Nietzsche. What is significant is that Rosenzweig characterizes his task as a fundamentally progressive one—he must improve upon and fix the failings of German Idealism. This is a rejection of a kind, but is qualitatively different than dismissing German philosophy because of German antisemitism. Rosenzweig eventually arrives at a Jewish philosophy, but it is one which he constructs from pieces he borrows from the German tradition. Even in his criticism of Hegel, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, he is merely the latest in a long tradition of German thinkers who "announced both the demise of metaphysics and the beginning of a new, superior philosophy."⁵⁸ As N.N. Glatzer writes in his introduction to *The Star*, "Despite his harsh criticism of the German idealistic tradition, its influence on Rosenzweig persisted both in the

⁵⁶ Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 6.

⁵⁷ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, 9.

⁵⁸ Peter Gordon, *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 137.

realm of philosophical issues and in writing style.”⁵⁹ Some have even suggested that “the Jewish religion does not serve as the presupposition for Rosenzweig’s thought – rather, it is thought, born out of Rosenzweig’s own experience, which concludes in the confirmation of that religion.”⁶⁰ In other words, Rosenzweig constructs his expressions of Judaism using German *Bildung*.

In this way, Rosenzweig’s intellectual evolution is similar to Schoenberg’s musical evolution. Much more than his predecessor, Mahler, or even his contemporary, Rosenzweig, Schoenberg was caught between worlds, relying on German traditions to achieve his revolutionary ideas. Schoenberg had little personal connection to Jewish folk culture. As Michael Cherlin wrote, “through *Bildung*, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Wagner and others had become his *Volk*.”⁶¹ Mahler was not the only composer turning to folk melodies—Bela Bartók, Igor Stravinsky, and many others looked to previous centuries for inspiration after the decline of German romanticism. But Schoenberg almost never did, and it certainly was not a primary source of inspiration. He was unapologetic in his loyalty to the German tradition, now his *Volk*. So much so that, upon his development of serialism—the compositional technique for which he is most famous—Schoenberg is said to have remarked that he just “ensured the supremacy of German music for the next hundred years.” Therefore, his musical development presents a paradox. He clearly feels, increasingly throughout his life, that his Jewish identity

⁵⁹ Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, xvi.

⁶⁰ Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism: The history of Jewish philosophy from Biblical times to Franz Rosenzweig* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 372.

⁶¹ Cherlin, *Schoenberg’s Musical Imagination*, 41.

must come before his German one. Musically, however, he is protective of his German identity, and never abandons it for a flight into a romanticized Jewish Eastern European past or culture.

Schoenberg grew up in the musically decadent era of German late romanticism. His student years saw premieres of all four Brahms symphonies and the ubiquity of Wagner operas, or “music-dramas” as Wagner called them. Schoenberg was twenty-three years old when Gustav Mahler became opera director in Schoenberg’s native Vienna, and his personal writings make clear his tremendous veneration of German composition from J. S. Bach onwards. Apart from a brief period of lessons with friend and mentor Alexander Zemlinsky, Schoenberg was an almost exclusively self-taught composer. Or rather, as he wrote in 1931 while at work on *Moses und Aron*, “My teachers were primarily Bach and Mozart, and secondarily Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner.”⁶² Schoenberg, who loved explaining himself, went on to record what exactly he learned from each of these composers, including: “[From Bach,] the art of producing everything from one thing and of relating figures by transformation... [From Mozart,] co-ordination of heterogeneous characters to form a thematic unity... [From Beethoven,] the art of variation and of varying... [From Wagner,] relatedness of tones and chords... [And from Brahms,] economy, yet richness.”⁶³

The composers Schoenberg took the time to list in this essay represent, in music theory parlance, the Common Practice Era (CPE). This era was marked by stylistic conventions across musical categories, including rhythm, form, instrumentation, and many others. CPE harmony can be summarized in the concept of tonality, more specifically called the tonal system or common-

⁶² Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 173.

⁶³ Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 173-174.

practice tonality. The most important tension in common-practice tonality is between consonance and dissonance. Some harmonies are considered consonant, some are considered dissonant, and there are conventions as to how dissonant harmonies “resolve” into consonant harmonies in sequence. One way to look at CPE music is as one increasingly intricate game of composers constantly raising the complexity of what “counts” as consonant and dissonance and then trying to resolve dissonance in satisfying ways. Of course, it is not simply musical wordplay—these conventions ostensibly become about greater self-expression and artistic achievement—but wordplay is a very important part of the process.⁶⁴

Schoenberg’s early music, as profound and provocative as it is, fits comfortably within a CPE framework. In the first decade of the twentieth century, however, he began to question the appropriateness of this tonal language for truly modern music. By his second string quartet (1908), Schoenberg had confirmed for himself the insufficiency of his inherited musical language and the necessity of new sounds. Writing years later, Schoenberg reflected:

My Two Ballads, Op. 12, were the immediate predecessors of the Second String Quartet, Op. 10, which marks the transition to my second period. In this period I renounced a tonal centre... In the first and second movements there are many sections in which the individual parts proceed regardless of whether or not their meeting results in codified harmonies... the overwhelming multitude of dissonances cannot be counterbalanced any longer by occasional returns to such tonal triads as represent a key.⁶⁵

This is the beginning of a compositional period known as atonality. In it, Schoenberg ignores all the harmonic conventions of CPE music in favor of the free association of tones. Atonality is a

⁶⁴ This “wordplay” is often used as a reason music was the preferred method of acculturation for Viennese Jews in previous generations, as discussed in the previous chapter. Fundamentally, this music was a game, albeit a complex one with emotional and occasionally philosophical cards.

⁶⁵ Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 86.

rejection of the dichotomy of consonance and dissonance as fixed categories, what Schoenberg called the “emancipation of dissonance.”

This satisfied Schoenberg for a while, but he eventually became skeptical of this new musical world as well. When he abandoned the harmonic conventions of CPE music, he necessarily abandoned the structure of tension and release (dissonance and consonance) by which his predecessors created musical ideas. By design, atonality has none of this, meaning that the composer must find a way to create the context for development, expectation, tension, and resolution within each piece. To do this, in the 1920s and 1930s Schoenberg restructured his musical language yet again. This new development, now known as serialism, is Schoenberg’s greatest compositional achievement.

In a serialist composition, the structural guidelines provided by CPE music are instead accomplished by using a tone row. A tone row is a way to impose a hierarchy on the twelve equal notes of an octave by creating an order that serves as a template for further development. It uses each of the twelve notes exactly once, producing a twelve-tone series, or “tone row,” that can then be shifted (transposed), played in retrograde (backwards), inverted (played “upside-down” by interval), and used in many other methods of alteration that take the place of common-practice harmonic development.⁶⁶ Often, serialist composers will use multiple tone rows in a single composition, almost in the way CPE composers used different keys. These rows can interact with each other during a piece, and in large works often pass melodic material back and

⁶⁶ For instance, one could create the row C-C#-D-D#-E-F-F#-G-G#-A-A#-B. This is simply all 12 notes of an octave in order, as they appear on a piano keyboard. While technically conforming to the rules, it is rarely seen because it presents few and uninteresting possibilities for development. For instance, playing this row in retrograde sounds identical to playing it in inversion, which most people would find boring.

forth. Schoenberg saw the continuity of developmental methods to be just as important as the break with tonal structures. In this sense, he moves beyond Rosenzweig, who used German philosophical tools almost by accident. Very consciously, Schoenberg writes himself into history, taking care to record exactly how his methods build on the past.

Schoenberg lived at a peculiar moment in German Jewish history. For the previous hundred years, Central European Jewry had dutifully learned the ins and outs of German *Bildung*. They played Beethoven, quoted Schiller, and studied Kant. But there was always a utilitarian aspect to their cultural acquisitions. German *Bildung* was a game to be mastered, and the rewards were significant. But Schoenberg, like many of his generation, was different. By the end of the nineteenth century, German Jews were starting to solidify their cultural legitimacy in Central Europe, and their relationship to *Bildung* became less instrumental. Schoenberg never thought of Bach, Mozart, or Beethoven as obligatory castor oil for survival in Viennese high society. Rather, he is emblematic of a generation of German Jews who fully accepted *Bildung* as their birthright. This generation—Rosenzweig included—reflected in their work the paradoxical circumstances of their life. The cultural capital accumulated by generations had never been less secure, and yet Jews had never been more German than they were in the early 1930s. As the following chapter explores, for Schoenberg, in particular, his claim to German identity was first and foremost a claim to German musical modernism.

Chapter 2

For words are clumsy mountaineers and clumsy miners. Not for them to bring down treasures from the mountains' peaks, or up from the mountains' bowels.

— Franz Kafka, letters, 1900⁶⁷

Schoenberg's opera *Moses und Aron* is famously unfinished. It was set aside in 1932, just before Schoenberg fled German antisemitism and landed in the United States. Though he kept claiming he would return to the piece, no further work was done before he died in 1951. Perhaps because of this delayed publication, Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* is often simplified into a musical expression of “twenty-twenty” philosophical hindsight, a portentous omen of the tragedy that was about to befall Europe shortly after Schoenberg set its composition aside.

Simultaneously, Schoenberg's development of serialism is often linearized simply as part of the German compositional tradition, understood as a strictly musical enterprise unaffected by anything except the composers of generations past. It is useful, instead, to reframe both developments as part of the philosophical confusion of the early twentieth century, rather than as either solely musical developments or as checkpoints on the road to the catastrophe of WWII.

Much as the previous chapter examined Schoenberg's relationship as a German Jewish cultural figure in relation to Rosenzweig's attempts at a similar symbiosis, this chapter demonstrates the similarity of Schoenberg's concerns with that of two roughly contemporaneous Viennese Jewish modernists, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Sigmund Freud. Like Wittgenstein, Schoenberg was concerned with language and the communicability of the modern world. And

⁶⁷ Franz Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York; Schocken Books, 1977), 1.

like Freud, Schoenberg was concerned with the possibility of Jewish identity or existence in a time of rising antisemitism. Indeed, Schoenberg joined Freud's premise that Moses was the Biblical figure best positioned to help a new generation reconstruct a Jewish identity. In this sense, Schoenberg's opera does not capture an idea so much as a process—the musical and textual questions he confronts are analogous to, rather than representative of, his contemporaries' intellectual concerns. Music is a kind of language, but one with peculiarities well suited to Schoenberg's intellectual moment. In *Moses und Aron*, Schoenberg displays a gymnast's combination of elegance and rigor, exploiting the possibilities of allusion and gesture accessible in musical composition. This alternative medium means he can allow for the complexities, intricacies, and contradictions that exist in both Judaism and modernism, where Wittgenstein and Freud are forced into more concrete choices, whose very concreteness undermines its goals.

Most historians have understood Viennese modernism in terms analogous to Freud or Wittgenstein—as emblematic of a time and a place of tragedy and impossibility. Yet here, I suggest an alternative reading based on Schoenberg's *Moses and Aron*. In this chapter, I argue that Schoenberg reframes some of the key concerns of Viennese Jewish modernism—the perceived impossibility of language as a form of expression, or the impossibility of being Jewish in the modern world—as motivation to create rather than to despair. In particular, this chapter uses Schoenberg's technique of *Sprechstimme* to consider how he plays with the questions of speakability that motivated both Wittgenstein and Freud. Rather than following these latter two, who saw language either as fundamentally insufficient or solely as an expression of personal desires and drives, Schoenberg's use of *Sprechstimme* in the opera makes tangible the theme of communication, thereby returning it to the agency of his characters.

Born in Vienna in 1889, Wittgenstein investigated the relationship between language and reality. He published *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in 1922; like Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption*, much of it was written on small notebooks and postcards in the trenches of World War I. The *Tractatus* was as revolutionary as it was dense, and in it, Wittgenstein was concerned with the ability of language to accurately describe the world which created it. In other words, Wittgenstein argued that language is a product of the world, and is thus by definition only a small part of the world. Given this, how can one small part of the world hope to describe the whole? In non-linguistic contexts, this concern is not new. The inability of humans—a product of the world—to understand God, their creator, is central to the Jewish religious tradition and many others. For Wittgenstein, however, the stakes are raised. At issue is not so much the inability to understand, but rather the inability to communicate, from which misunderstanding follows. In the *Tractatus*, he concludes, despairingly, that language is simply insufficient.

Schoenberg shared Wittgenstein's worries about the implications of an inadequate language. However, since his medium was music rather than the German language, he approached the problem differently. Musical language, after all, is transformable in ways the spoken and written word simply is not. Rather than give up on musical language, Schoenberg simply changed it, creating new structures that were about to gesture towards the ideas he felt were necessary. Hence, in Schoenberg, the inadequacy of language becomes a creative impetus instead of an unfortunate conclusion. This is perhaps most clearly seen in *Moses and Aron*, where Schoenberg addresses the question of language and expressibility, both through its plot and his use of the musical possibilities of serialism and *Sprechstimme*.

In his engagement with musical language, Schoenberg already shows an affinity for the concerns of Wittgenstein. Like Wittgenstein's concerns about the inadequacy of written language to express the world, Schoenberg worried about the exhaustion of expressive possibilities in tonal music. He allegorizes these frustrations in Act II of *Moses and Aron*.

Act II of *Moses und Aron* is dedicated to the story of the Golden Calf. Moses has left the Israelites for 40 days to retrieve the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai. While he is gone, Aron has difficulty keeping people from losing faith. The Israelites question God's power and purpose, and begin to remember some of the comforts they had with idolatry, before Moses and monotheism took them out of Egypt and into the desert. Privately, Aron shares their concerns. Together they construct a golden calf and start to bring offerings. Soon, of course, Moses returns. Furious, he blames Aron for a lack of leadership and smashes the tablets of the Ten Commandments. The Israelites, Aron included, exit the stage, leaving Moses alone. He says:

Inconceivable God!
 Inexpressible, many-sided idea,
 Will you let it be so explained?
 Shall Aron, my mouth, fashion this image?
 Then I have fashioned an image too, false,
 As an image must be.
 Thus am I defeated!
 Thus, all was but madness that
 I believed before,
 And can and must not be given voice.
 O word, thou word, that I lack!

These words close the second act.

Schoenberg's Moses knows instinctively what Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* tries to prove—that language is insufficient to explain a world of “many-sided ideas.” Here, Schoenberg combines his interest in Jewish origins with his modernist aesthetic convictions. Traditional

Judaism has long forbidden the representation of God by image or by word. No visual representations are allowed in synagogues, and although God's name exists theoretically (there are many spellings, a common transliteration is YHWH), it is never spoken aloud. Other phrases (The Lord, The Holy One, etc.) are used instead. Indeed, the conventional interpretation of the Golden Calf story is just that—the Israelites had replaced Moses's immaterial, omnipresent God with a visible, material image. Moses's anger, traditionally, is over what he considers fickleness on the part of the Israelites and their insufficient faith in a God they cannot see. Schoenberg does not undermine this reading, but his text—which he wrote himself, unusual for an opera composer—introduces another interpretation. It is not that idols (analogous here to Wittgenstein's argument about the insufficiency of language) are merely wrong, it is that they could never be able to describe God. Language, and all worldly material, is inherently unable to represent its creator. For the Israelites, God was un-representable by prohibition. But for Schoenberg God must be un-representable by definition. Anything so important and so fundamental could never be described through normal human means.

To further capture Moses' expressive limitations, Schoenberg uses a vocal technique called *Sprechstimme*, which instructs the performer to present the words halfway between speaking and singing. Different composers have different notation methods for this technique; Schoenberg writes traditional pitches on a conventional staff, but replaces the noteheads with x's to indicate their approximate nature. *Sprechstimme* still has contour, but no true pitches. In the actual Biblical text of this story, Moses has a stutter, hence his need for Aaron's communicative abilities. While it is possible to see Schoenberg's *Sprechstimme* as his musical response to this aspect of the story, *Sprechstimme* is not simply the vocal equivalent of a stutter. Schoenberg

never discussed his creative process regarding his use of Sprechstimme, but there was a traceable development—Schoenberg used it first in *Gurre-Lieder* (composed 1900-1901, published 1912) and then most famously in *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912). In neither of these works did it represent a stutter. It was rather an alternative mode of expression, designed to posit specific artistic ideas.

In *Moses und Aron*, *Sprechstimme* underscores the distance between the ideas Moses hopes to convey and his ability to convey them. *Sprechstimme* is a technically difficult and physically taxing technique. Its execution in performance does not present Moses as unable to speak fluently but, rather, as communicating in a form wholly distinct and distant from both the ideas in his head and their intended recipients. In this scene, Schoenberg is representing the confluence of two intellectual trajectories. First, of course, is the classical Jewish prohibition against representations of God, in images or in words. Second is the growing philosophical skepticism, exemplified in Wittgenstein, of the ability of words to accurately represent anything, least of all the divine. Schoenberg's Moses is twice pained—first by the Israelites' disregard for Jewish law through their representation of God, and second by his own inability to express God to them, had it been permissible.

And yet, for a scene that is arguably about the failures of language, Schoenberg is very linguistically ambitious. The *Tractatus*, as dense as it is, clearly attempts to circumvent the linguistic problems it then describes. Wittgenstein's writing style of brief, bulleted points—built like a mathematical proof—serves as a small countermeasure against the paradox of writing a book about the failure of words. Schoenberg does not share this sensibility but, in a different way, the Golden Calf scene is itself a virtuosic display of a wide range of languages, musical and otherwise, which similarly seek to transcend the paradox of language's insufficiency. His

transformations of the tone row are subtle and complex, the artistic license he gives himself in translating Biblical verse into operatic libretto is wide-ranging, and he even deploys a new linguistic register by using *Sprechstimme*. In this concerted play with language, Schoenberg resembles another Viennese modernist, Sigmund Freud. And yet if Freud, like Schoenberg, was not entirely stymied by the insufficiency of language, Freud would focus on a different fundamental and inescapable paradox: the possibility, or rather impossibility, of the modern world itself.

Freud did not share Wittgenstein's disillusionment with language, writing in 1913 that "words were originally magic and to this day words have retained much of their original magical power."⁶⁸ While at first glance it is hard to reconcile Freud's love of language and belief in the significance of words with Wittgenstein's skepticism, they are less in conflict than they are simply in parallel, with different understandings of language that speak to different concerns. Freud's lecture continues, "By words one person can make another blissfully happy or drive him to despair, by words the teacher conveys his knowledge to his pupils... Words provoke affects and are in general the means of mutual influence among men."⁶⁹ For Freud, the goal of language was to reveal the personal and idiosyncratic, not the fundamental. As he writes in *An Outline of*

⁶⁸ Freud, *Introductory Lectures*, quoted in Yosef Yerushalmi, "The Moses of Freud and the Moses of Schoenberg: On Words, Idolatry, and Psychoanalysis," in *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 47 (1992), 11.

⁶⁹ Freud, *Introductory Lectures* quoted in Yerushalmi, "The Moses of Freud and the Moses of Schoenberg," 11-12.

Psychoanalysis, “Reality will always remain unknowable.”⁷⁰ And yet, for Freud, as with Schoenberg, words retained their power despite this insufficiency.

Furthermore, like Schoenberg, Freud in the 1930s turned to Moses, with *Moses and Monotheism* being published in 1939, shortly after Freud’s death. Freud and Schoenberg shared other commonalities as well: each was responsible for a revolution in their respective fields, each was an assimilated (or converted) Jew, who returned to Judaism later in life. And yet, their respective Moses’s tell us as much about the differences between Freud and Schoenberg as about their commonalities. *Moses and Monotheism*, while sharing tangential points of contact with Schoenberg’s opera, is different in kind and in purpose. Schoenberg sees—or at least hopes for—much more continuity between his contemporary moment and Freud’s “remote Mosaic past.”⁷¹

Freud was famously concerned about the possibility of communication and its embeddedness in emotion. His psychoanalytic method both rested upon and sought to transcend this fact. Freud returned to Moses multiple times as a frame for these issues. Two decades before *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud published an anonymous essay in *Imago*, the journal he co-founded in 1912 with Hanns Sachs and Otto Rank, entitled *The Moses of Michelangelo*. In it, he suggested a dramatically alternative reading of Moses’ story with the commandments. The conventional interpretation of the statue presents Moses in the act of noticing the Israelites idolatry, and in the act of rising to smash the tablets. Freud disagrees, citing the physical design of the statue and its original intention as part of a set of several seated figures. Instead, he writes

⁷⁰ Freud, *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* quoted in Yerushalmi, “The Moses of Freud and the Moses of Schoenberg,” 10.

⁷¹ Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* quoted in Mark Berry, *After Wagner: Histories of Modernist Music Drama from Parsifal to Nono* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2014), 87.

that “Moses desired to act, to spring up and take vengeance and forget the Tablets; but he has overcome the temptation, and he will now remain seated and still, in his frozen wrath and in his pain mingled with contempt.”⁷² He presents Moses as a figure of suppressed fury, one whose communications with the Israelites are filtered through his perspective and role as their prophet.

In some ways, Schoenberg’s opera can be read as analogous to this interpretation. The Wittgensteinian reading of *Sprechstimme* emphasized the distance between Moses’ words and ideas. For Freud, language is a window not to the world but rather to the person, and thus a Freudian reading of *Sprechstimme* would emphasize Moses’ suppression and restraint in his communication with Israel. Although rarely remarked upon in the literature, Moses is in fact not in *Sprechstimme* for the entire work. In one brief instance, in the second scene of the opera, Schoenberg allows him to sing like Aaron:

Purify your thinking.
Free it from worthless things.
Let it be righteous.

As in any good text, there is not an obvious answer to why Moses sings here and only here. However, it is early in the opera, so the listener knows, by the time of the Golden Calf, that Moses can sing. This makes *Sprechstimme* a decision, rather than a condition.

When Schoenberg’s Moses is in the analogous position as Freud’s imagined Moses of Michelangelo—of first noticing the Israelites around the statue—he says, in *Sprechstimme*, “Begone, you image of powerlessness to enclose the boundless in an image finite!” and then turns his attention to Aaron. He does not become angry at the Israelites directly, only at their idol

⁷² Freud, “The Moses of Michelangelo (1914)” in *Totem and Taboo and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 229.

itself. In so doing, he becomes, as Freud writes, “more than human... so that the giant frame with its tremendous physical power becomes only a concrete expression of the highest mental achievement that is possible in a man, that of struggling successfully against an inward passion for the sake of a cause to which he has devoted himself.”⁷³

Freud understands Michelangelo’s Moses in a position of constant self-editing. In his role between the people and their God, Moses struggles with how to present himself. What results is a figure who, in his effort to be reserved, becomes hesitant. Schoenberg concerns himself with similar questions, albeit musically. By introducing one instance where Moses does not use *Sprechstimme*, Schoenberg invites the listener to then view Moses’ lilting dialogue as a choice for the operatic Moses, rather than the stutter intrinsic to the Biblical character. *Sprechstimme* becomes for Moses the appropriate middle ground for someone struggling to connect God and Israel.

In the end, Freud sees Moses as a figure of frustration. He is thwarted by the dissonance of his role as God’s go-between with Israel. Schoenberg, the “emancipator of dissonance,” sees this un-resolvability and rewrites it with its own voice, *Sprechstimme*. *Sprechstimme* is hesitant and modern at the same time. And, for Schoenberg’s Moses, it is a choice. Like Freud and Wittgenstein, Schoenberg was concerned with the expressive possibilities of language and the existential possibilities of Judaism. However, through his new language of serialism and the expressive possibilities of *Sprechstimme*, Schoenberg takes inspiration from linguistic hesitance or inadequacy to create new musical ideas.

⁷³ Freud, “The Moses of Michelangelo (1914),” 233.

Chapter 3

Schoenberg's revolutionary status—or lack thereof—has vexed critics and biographers since his first forays into atonality in 1909. Schoenberg himself understood the European musical tradition as a series of revolutions, each inventing new means of expression. In a 1946 essay, Schoenberg wrote (*italics from the original*):

What is New Music? Evidently it must be music which, though it is still music, differs in all essentials from previously composed music. Evidently it must express something which has not yet been expressed in music. Evidently, in higher art, only that is worth being presented which has never before been presented... This is the code of honour of all the great in art, and consequently in all great works of the great we will find that newness which never perishes, whether it be of Josquin des Prés, of Bach or Haydn, or of any other great master. *Because: Art means New Art.*⁷⁴

Schoenberg introduces a paradox. He claims both that his music, which he identifies as new music, “differs in all essentials from previously composed music” and that this links him with a history of European art music dating back to the Renaissance. This “Schoenbergian paradox” has been studied by historians and musicologists many times, as Malcolm MacDonald notes in the 2008 reissue of his Schoenberg biography.⁷⁵ Writing in Vienna, Willi Reich labeled him a “conservative revolutionary” in his 1968 biography, while MacDonald himself chose “revolutionary conservative” in his 1976 first edition.^{76, 77} In J. Peter Burkholder's essay *Schoenberg the Reactionary*—which resonates in title and in content with Schoenberg's famous essay *Brahms the Progressive*—Burkholder suggests that, in fact, Schoenberg's revolutionary

⁷⁴ Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 114-115.

⁷⁵ MacDonald, *Schoenberg*, 89.

⁷⁶ Willi Reich, *Arnold Schönberg oder der konservative Revolutionär* (Vienna: Molden, 1968).

⁷⁷ MacDonald, *Schoenberg*, 89.

characteristics are precisely what is so traditional about him.⁷⁸ Burkholder puts it well, writing that “his [Schoenberg’s] twelve-tone music is simultaneously progressive and reactionary: progressive because it extends and codifies techniques present in his earlier music to create something truly new; reactionary because it resurrects through new musical techniques the structural functions of tonality and recapitulates the major forms of the common-practice period.”⁷⁹

This “Schoenbergian paradox,” though exemplified dramatically in his music, is not unique to Schoenberg. It plagued countless contemporaries, and encapsulates a central tension in Viennese modernism. The Vienna Secession, an art movement and institution that included Gustav Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka, and Egon Schiele, had on their building a motto reminiscent of Schoenberg’s essay: *Der Zeit ihre Kunst. Der Kunst ihre Freiheit.*—“To every age its art. To every art its freedom.” They rebelled against their academic establishment and were distrustful of historical influence. At the same time, Klimt’s Beethoven Frieze—one of the quintessential Secessionist works—was designed around Max Klinger’s Beethoven sculpture and is completely in the spirit of a nineteenth century Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Nor was this paradox limited to the fine arts—both Wittgenstein and Rosenzweig produced revolutionary works of philosophy, but in their dismissal of previous German thought, joined a long line of German philosophers announcing their revolutionary status.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ J. Peter Burkholder, “Schoenberg the Reactionary,” in *Schoenberg and His World*, ed. Walter Frisch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 162-195.

⁷⁹ Burkholder, “Schoenberg the Reactionary,” 162.

⁸⁰ A curious footnote of history, reminding us that the personal and the intellectual are often connected: Ludwig Wittgenstein’s father Karl provided most of the funding to build the Vienna Secession building.

The problem was doubly acute in music, because in addition to the general skepticism of the moment, Schoenberg and his contemporaries—composers such as Bela Bartók or Igor Stravinsky—had to contend with the increasingly untenable status of German romanticism. The first notes of Wagner’s opera *Tristan und Isolde* (1859) foreshadowed the exhaustibility of consonance and dissonance within CPE style. Not only does the opera begin with a dissonant harmony, but both the first and second chords contain tritones—the most dissonant interval in the CPE universe—the second chord leaving the first unresolved. Wagner and others were approaching the limits of what was possible without a fundamental break from CPE conventions, anticipating the atonality that Schoenberg would announce several decades later. By the end of the nineteenth century, the expressive toolbox of tonal music was becoming depleted. For many composers of the early twentieth century, these dual disillusionments—with German philosophy and German music—demanded new fundamentals of composition. In *The Rite of Spring* (1913), Stravinsky turns nature on itself, depicting Spring as a source of fear and intimidation rather than shelter and inspiration. In 1908, Bartók began traveling the Hungarian countryside to collect folk melodies, on a search for new musical roots.

Stravinsky’s and Bartók’s searches for a new musical language were each grounded in their own life and historical ties. Likewise, Schoenberg’s journey combined elements of his Jewish heritage, German allegiance, and modernist sympathies. The previous chapters have tried to understand Schoenberg as someone who cobbled together his own musical and intellectual roots from the kaleidoscopic array of fin-de-siècle Vienna. In particular, there were three types of roots in *Moses und Aron*. First is *Bildung* or, more specifically, the German musical canon. As the introduction and Chapter One discussed, Schoenberg saw himself as continuing the work of

Beethoven, Brahms, and even Wagner. This is clear in the opera from his use of different variations of the tone row to form tonal centers reminiscent of CPE developmental style. *Moses und Aron* is also grounded in the Bible, from which Schoenberg drew most of his Jewish inspiration. German Jews of his generation were largely cut off from, as Kafka describes in his famous letter to his father, the “souvenirs of earlier times.”⁸¹ Without this connection to a living Jewish tradition, Schoenberg and others turned to the Bible to reconstruct their Jewish identity. Finally, *Moses und Aron* uses only one tone row to create the entire piece. This decision, also used to great effect in the string trio, creates an origin for the piece. In the opera, the row grounds Schoenberg in a similar way as the Bible does—amid the chaos of modernism and political turmoil, Schoenberg reaches for Biblical monotheism through his use of a single tone row.

These aspects of Schoenberg—what might be called consciously invented roots—are important, and should not be understated. However, as the earlier discussion of MacDonald’s Schoenbergian paradox suggests, they do not present completely satisfying answers. For every way in which Schoenberg is grounded, there are others in which he is rootless. Even the act of searching for one’s own roots betrays the uncertainty of Schoenberg’s musical, intellectual, and cultural heritage. However, paradox is an unsatisfying characterization. The many sides to Schoenberg’s musical expression are not, to analogize to CPE style, a dissonance waiting for their proper resolution. Rather, in the spirit of Schoenberg’s “emancipated dissonance,” they coexist as mutually influential dimensions in Schoenberg’s artistic life. In this chapter, I argue

⁸¹ Franz Kafka, *Letter to His Father: Bilingual Edition*, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), 81.

that the paradoxical lens should be replaced by a dialectical one as a way of understanding both Schoenberg in general and this opera in particular.

During the nineteenth century, the philosophical study of dialectics rose in prominence, thanks in part to the influential work of G.F. Hegel and the ability of dialectics to address the increasing interconnectedness of modern thought. In the twentieth century there developed a large body of aesthetic theory that drew on the Hegelian dialectic and refashioned it to suit contemporary taste and criticism. One fundamental method of dialectics—namely, to understand things as interconnected through time—proved irresistible for theorists concerned with music, as music by definition presents itself through time. In particular, scholars have invoked dialectics to try and resolve the Schoenbergian paradox by re-characterizing Schoenberg’s contradictions as opposing poles of a dialectical process carrying Schoenberg both through each individual work and over his broader career.⁸²

Theodor Adorno is one of the first writers to use dialectics as a method for understanding Schoenberg and his work, beginning with his 1934 essay *The Dialectical Composer*. The essay does not address *Moses und Aron* directly, as it would not be introduced to the public until 1951. Nevertheless, the musical ideas in Adorno’s writing resonate with Schoenberg’s opera as much as his other works. While the idea of the “Schoenbergian paradox” points to the coexistence of seeming contradictions in his life and music, Adorno insists that these differences exist across

⁸² It is worth noting that the twin concerns of dialectics and rootlessness are both central to the intellectual output of twentieth century Jewry. First the crisis of German assimilation and then the creation of Israel propelled waves of Jewish commentary on the role, merits, or lack thereof of a diasporic existence. Simultaneously, twentieth century dialectics as embodied in the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory was a heavily Jewish enterprise, including Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse. In Schoenberg, these parallel traditions come together.

time not as a teleological development, but rather through a series of successive, albeit non-propulsive, resolutions. For Adorno, Schoenberg's music "radically refuses to submit to the categories with which intellectual history, no matter how progressive it would like to seem, inevitably and in a banal way seeks to create unity in the variety of an artist's work—the categories of development and the organic."⁸³ In this sense, the trajectory of Schoenberg's career is a dialectical process itself, where each successive work comments on and interacts with the previous piece. Adorno writes, "Although each work by Schoenberg follows the previous one in a compulsory way, they by no means grow out of each other. They emerge from each other not in smallest interval, but in reversal..."⁸⁴ The phrase "compulsory way" here is particularly important. Adorno departs from conventional understandings of the Schoenbergian paradox by analyzing Schoenberg's revolutionary and conservative aspects as two sides of the same coin, rather than as contradictions. Adorno characterizes Schoenberg's series of works as a conversation between the more intimate vocal music with the large instrumental pieces. However, "the questions that their material leaves behind, as it emerges from composition, are hardly ever answered in calm progression, but instead with catastrophes. The answer destroys the question and the material from which it emerged; it sets truly new music."⁸⁵ Adorno agrees here with Schoenberg's credo, "art means new art," and sees Schoenberg not just as embarking on a career-long project of revolution and reform, but as engaged with the transformation of musical expression in every new piece.

⁸³ Theodor Adorno, "The Dialectical Composer" in *Essays On Music*, ed. Richard Leppert trans. Susan Gillespie (Los Angeles: University of California, 2002), 203.

⁸⁴ Adorno, *The Dialectical Composer*, 203-204.

⁸⁵ Adorno, *The Dialectical Composer*, 204.

While Adorno sees dialectics as a nearly psychological lens onto Schoenberg's compositional practice, other scholars have seen serialism itself as particularly suited to a formal method of dialectical analysis. Here, the same series of oppositions, syntheses, and breakdowns common to most work in dialectics are applied to the ways Schoenberg manipulates a tone row. In his work *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, Schoenberg wrote, "All good music consists of many contrasting ideas. An idea achieves its distinctness and validity in contrast with others. Heraclitus called contrast 'the principle of development.' Musical thinking is subject to the same dialectic as all other thinking."⁸⁶

In the principal tone row of *Moses und Aron*, Schoenberg embeds contrasting ideas within the row. In a serialist composition, the twelve notes of the tone row are not used indiscriminately. Tone rows are constructed to have interesting characteristics. A classic method of analysis for tone rows is to analyze the groupings of notes within them, most commonly by dividing it into two groups of six pitches, called hexachords. In Schoenberg's row for *Moses und Aron*, these sets have the property of *hexachordal inversional combinatoriality*. In brief, inversional combinatoriality means that there is an unordered way to transform the first hexachord into the second hexachord.⁸⁷ Because the two hexachords in *Moses und Aron*'s tone row are related this way, dividing the row in half is one relevant partition. There are two other partitions that become expressively important in the opera, each with their own respective

⁸⁶ Cherlin, *Schoenberg's Musical Imagination*, 58.

⁸⁷ Inversion refers to the technique of reversing the direction of each interval jump, much as one would reflect a graph over the x-axis. For instance, if the first three notes of hexachord #1 were A—B—C, the first three notes of its inversion would be A—G—F#. The first chord begins by moving up a whole step and then up a half step, so its inversion begins by moving down a whole step then down a half step.

characteristics.⁸⁸ The first has three parts, dividing the twelve notes into a 3—6—3 structure. This focuses attention on a different hexachord, formed by the middle six notes of the row, which is palindromic in its intervals.⁸⁹ Finally, a third partition, into a 2—4—4—2 structure, creates two chromatic tetrachords which each have the same palindromic interval structure.⁹⁰ Having created a tone row with these various internal relationships, Schoenberg then plays with their associations throughout the opera. Understanding how the different partitions relate to each other is an inherently dialectical task; they are simultaneously in opposition and collaboration. Collaboratively, they are all needed to complete the piece, but in any one instance, understanding the row in terms of any particular partition precludes all others.

By the mid-twentieth century, as Schoenberg was writing, and certainly by the time the opera was published, German Jewish modernist thinkers had turned the valence of dialectics on its head, as they began to develop a theory of negative dialectics. Negative dialectics, though most clearly associated with Adorno, characterized a generation of theorists reacting to the incompatibility of Hegelian dialectics with the history of the first half of the twentieth century. They were still enamored with dialectical thinking, but were no longer convinced by notions of historical progress or synthesis. Adorno's negative dialectic provides a way of thinking that

⁸⁸ Unsurprisingly, there is disagreement about how many relevant distinct partitions there are. These three can be found in Cherlin, *Schoenberg's Musical Imagination*, but also other places.

⁸⁹ Listing the intervals between pitches in a tone row is a common way of revealing certain connections that would not be otherwise obvious. In this case, the internal hexachord contains the intervals 1, 10, 6, 10, 1.

⁹⁰ This means the third partition is intervallicly palindromic on two levels. There are 4 groups: [$\langle A, B\text{-flat} \rangle \langle E, D, E\text{-flat}, C\text{-sharp} \rangle \langle G, F, F\text{-sharp}, G\text{-sharp} \rangle \langle B, C \rangle$], which creates the interval structure [$\langle 1 \rangle \langle 10, 1, 10 \rangle \langle 10, 1, 10 \rangle \langle 1 \rangle$].

retains elements of the Hegelian development via conflict, but without the assumption of synthesis.

In the final scene of *Moses und Aron*, analyzed in the previous chapter, Schoenberg uses partitions of the tone row in *Moses und Aron* almost as Wagnerian leitmotifs, associating each with particular themes or characters. The first partition—dual hexachords—is sometimes called the prophetic partition, or the covenant partition. The second partition, the 3—6—3 partition, is sometimes called the divine partition for its association with God’s voice. These two partitions have large, structural, and recurring roles throughout the opera. The third partition, 2—4—4—2, is used much more sparingly. In fact, it only occurs at a few key moments, most notably the final scene of Act II.⁹¹

In a negative dialectical way, this partition can be understood as Schoenberg’s way of representing the breakdown of his serialist language, but completely within a serialist frame. First, the partition itself is subsumed by the most fundamental partition of the piece, the double hexachords: 2—4—4—2 is a subset of 6—6. Furthermore, in the final scene Schoenberg’s music is much richer, its timbre alluding to the operas of Wagner or the symphonies of Brahms. Its character is reminiscent of Schoenberg’s musical inheritance, as is the partition. The outer four notes of this partition—the two “2’s”—are B-flat, A, C, and B-natural. In German texts, B-flat is abbreviated to B, and the less common B-natural to H. Thus, the four outer notes read B, A, C,

⁹¹ These partitions can be found in Cherlin, *Schoenberg’s Musical Imagination*, 238.

H.⁹² Schoenberg's affinity with Bach is ever-present, and as his opera approaches its unfinished end, his compositional technique alludes to its own historicity.

In this self-referential moment, Schoenberg collapses the distinction between the competing forces of the "Schoenbergian paradox," connecting his most provocative musical ideas to the origins of his musical development. Often asked about the revolutionary nature of serialism, Schoenberg was fond of replying "Bach is the first composer with twelve tones." Late in life, he explained his reasoning in a 1950 essay, pointing out that in Fugue no. 24 in Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, the first statement of the fugal subject is actually a "tone row" with all twelve notes represented. He continues, writing that "in Fugue 24 the chromatically altered tones are neither substitutes nor parts of scales. They possess distinctly an independence resembling the unrelated tones of the chromatic scale in a basic set of a twelve-tone composition."⁹³ Serialism did not develop linearly from Bach's chromatic fugue—as the previous chapter described, Schoenberg's journey to serialism was through restraining a middle period of atonality rather than distilling ideas from his early CPE style compositions. Nor was Bach secretly a modernist; Schoenberg himself recognizes the fugue's embedded row as "an exceptional case."⁹⁴

Nevertheless, in this reading, Schoenberg understands musical history with the same negative dialectical lens that seduced many aesthetic theorists in the mid-twentieth century. His simultaneous allegiances to the conservative and the revolutionary require no resolution because

⁹² Schoenberg's inscription of Bach's name has been noticed by Cherlin and others, and the use of musical notes to spell names is not altogether uncommon in twentieth century music. There remains, however, disagreement as to how to interpret the significance of these names.

⁹³ Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 393.

⁹⁴ Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 393.

they are not seeking synthesis, but simply mutual acknowledgment. Schoenberg's acknowledgment of Bach—literally, his inscription—does not resolve the tone row into music compatible even with Fugue no. 24, let alone the rest of Bach's music. Instead, it recognizes the debt of all revolutions to their intellectual predecessors, and momentarily stops the progression of operatic time to reflect on the continuity of musical expression. Schoenberg interrupts the listener's understanding of time within *Moses und Aron* to recall the historicity of *Moses und Aron*.

This relationship between the two different levels of time is important to Schoenberg's music. *Moses und Aron*, like all musical works, controls the listener's perception of time. The tempo of the 2—4—4—2 partition in the Golden Calf scene, the length of the notes, and the total amount of music all curate an experience where the distribution of time is an artistic act. Simultaneously, however, Schoenberg's music encourages the listener to be aware of their position in historical time. The notes which spell B-A-C-H are not there to contextualize the characters in *Moses und Aron*, but rather the opera itself as a character in history.

The philosopher and theorist Walter Benjamin was concerned with similar problems of understanding time in his theory of allegory, writing in 1939 that “allegory is the armature of the modern.”⁹⁵ Like Schoenberg's interest in Bach's Baroque music, Benjamin was interested in Baroque drama, specifically the *Trauerspiel*, or mourning-play. In *The Origins of German Tragic Drama* (1928), Benjamin critiques the conventional view of allegory as a simple relationship between a concrete example and abstract principle. He argues that allegory “is not a playful

⁹⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Central Park,” in *New German Critique*, trans. Mark Harrington 34 (1985), 49.

illustrative technique, but a form of expression, just as speech is expression, and, indeed just as writing is.”⁹⁶ Allegory is, like Schoenberg’s B-A-C-H, a removal from the specific moment in time, and into the temporality of that very moment. As Benjamin writes, “in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history.”⁹⁷ Benjamin never saw *Moses und Aron*, but his conceptions of time share the penchant for interruption suggested by Schoenberg’s 2—4—4—2 partition.

Adorno would disagree. Fifteen years after writing *The Dialectical Composer*, Adorno published his book *Philosophy of New Music*. In it, he has come to see the serialism of Schoenberg as time-destructive. Schoenberg’s music “masters time—but no longer by guaranteeing its fulfillment, but rather by negating time through the suspension of all musical elements as a result of omnipresent construction.”⁹⁸ Adorno believes that musical time comes from its translation of intervals. He sees the tone row as constrictive in its ability to generate these intervals, and as such considers serialism the end of musical time. For Adorno, the “twelve-tone technique fundamentally destroys this relation. Time and interval diverge. All the intervallic relations are once and for all fixed by the basic row and its derivatives.”⁹⁹ Where Benjamin saw interruption and allegory, Adorno saw destruction.

⁹⁶ Benjamin, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (New York: Verso, 1998), 162.

⁹⁷ Benjamin, *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*, 166.

⁹⁸ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 50.

⁹⁹ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 59.

Thinking about *Moses und Aron* dialectically takes on a variety of forms. However, no matter how it is framed—with Adorno’s teleological destruction or Benjamin’s expressive interruption—it characterizes a piece of music that exists as a whole. Ultimately, while music is acknowledged to be in motion, the process of analysis used by both Adorno and Benjamin speaks to its existence as complete, observable and thus immobile. It becomes an image, and, as Benjamin writes in the *Arcades*, “image is dialectics at a standstill.”¹⁰⁰

Ending a dialectical analysis here, however, is in my view incomplete. The fact may at first appear trivial, but music is typically heard before it is read. This means there are different registers of expression possible within the same musical passage. For instance, in the opening scene of the opera—the Burning Bush—the middle hexachord of the 3—6—3 partition is heard in the cello and bassoon. This is reasonably obvious to a listener familiar with this kind of music, as the overall texture is soft and the row form is clearly stated. However, one measure later, the viola, clarinet and flute begin playing a line with the same contour but starting one half step higher. Again, due to the thin texture, the relationship of transposition is fairly obvious. But the new material is also a retrograde inversion of the figure in the cello and bassoon. This relationship is not likely to be discerned in real time, and would only be discovered by studying the physical score. Michael Cherlin suggests that this moment, coming at the point of Moses’ first divine revelation, connects the elusive complexity experienced by the listener with Moses’ own confusion and uncertainty.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin, “Awakening” in *Arcades*, quoted in Max Pensky, “Method and Time: Walter Benjamin’s Dialectical Images,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. David Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 177.

¹⁰¹ Cherlin, *Schoenberg’s Musical Imagination*, 242.

A true dialectical analysis of *Moses und Aron* must account for the possibility of discovery. While even Adorno did not account for discovery in his analysis of serialism, Schoenberg did. While the three partitions discussed earlier are present—at least abstractly—in the tone row from the very beginning, so are many others. Their relevance is created by Schoenberg during the opera, and discovered by the listener throughout the piece. The same is true of Schoenberg's tone row. Serialist pieces often start with the fundamental row clearly stated in one voice, announcing to the listener the material which will be developed later. This practice is very similar to classical forms, where melodies are stated clearly and without ornamentation before the composer begins their alterations. In *Moses und Aron*, Schoenberg buries the row forms under thick musical textures and spread out between many instruments. It is only by the end of the opera that, retroactively, one can see the row at work.¹⁰² A process of discovery characterizes both what Schoenberg engaged in during his compositional process, and what the audience member engages in during its performance, and it is through this shared discovery that Schoenberg transcends his paradox.

¹⁰² Schoenberg shared a deep personal and artistic friendship with the architect Adolf Loos. The characteristics of Schoenberg's music that deal with discovery, process, and a reluctance to present the work as comprehensible from afar, without experiencing it, share their impetus with the ideas behind Loos's split level designs in the Rufer Haus.

Conclusion

Schoenberg must be read—and heard—with an awareness of the skepticism and uncertainty which defined his generation. After well over a century of progress towards an assimilated German Jewish future, the turn of the twentieth century gave rise to a *völkisch* nationalism and populist antimodernism that threatened this relationship. In response, some Jewish writers mirrored the inward turn of German culture, rediscovering and elevating Jewish folk literature and traditional customs. This left Schoenberg, and many like him, in a precarious position. To their fellow Germans, they would always first be Jewish, but they had succeeded sufficiently in their project of cultural adoption that they could not abandon German tradition altogether, be it within the philosophical or musical realm. Consequently, when Schoenberg and Rosenzweig created their Jewish works, they had to construct their new Jewish expression on a foundation of German craft.

In *Moses und Aron*, Schoenberg not only creates new forms of Jewish expressivity, he demonstrates the ability of music to speak to the particular concerns of Viennese Jewish modernism. His use of *Sprechstimme* connects specifically Jewish concerns about the unspeakability of God with the broader modernist skepticism of language. At the same time, with *Sprechstimme* Schoenberg reframes Moses as not only prophetic but hesitant, allowing him create a work that simultaneously understands the prevailing skepticism about the power of language and the equally intense desire to use speech as a window to the unconscious.

Moses und Aron shows that the tensions created by Schoenberg's project of constructing a new musical language while staying loyal to the German canon are best understood dialectically, not paradoxically. Engagement with the opera is a process of discovery rather than

deduction; there is no grand plan. In a 1974 interview promoting his recording of *Moses und Aron*, the conductor Michael Gielen discussed the difference between Schoenberg's serialism and the serialism of one of Schoenberg's most famous students, Anton Webern. Gielen explained that Webern constructed tone rows in advance, carefully planning the various internal relationships he wanted to develop later on in the piece. Schoenberg, by contrast, started with "the idea which contains 8 or 11 or what notes, and then one adjusts this to obtain a series."¹⁰³ In other words, Schoenberg's motivation was always the expressive idea, rather than a predetermined system. For Schoenberg, the process of composition was itself a process of discovery, mirroring the process of discovery that he invites the audience to join in each performance.

Schoenberg's serialism, if hastily characterized, can appear to be almost a paint-by-numbers style of composition. Its mathematical relationships often feel algorithmic to contemporary taste, particularly after the musical experimentation in the second half of the twentieth century. This view is reinforced by a selective reading of Schoenberg's own writing, which can appear dogmatic, ungenerous, and inflexible. This thesis pushes back against that conception, however, and argues that a fuller understanding of Schoenberg—and, in particular, of *Moses und Aron*—draws out his remarkable ability to weave together musical and philosophical threads with a lightness and ease that belies their individual gravity.

This thesis began with a brief discussion of Schoenberg's String Trio, op. 45, and its curious use of Viennese waltz fragments, always incomplete and surrounded by more recognizably serialist material. The Trio's autobiographical nature suggests the Viennese waltz as a source of comfort and safety, Schoenberg completing the piece shortly after a near-fatal heart

¹⁰³ Akademie der Künste Archiv, Berlin: *Gielen 163*

attack. However, Schoenberg's complete political rejection of Vienna—as demonstrated in his rewrite of *Wein, du Stadt meiner Träume*—suggests that the waltz is being defeated by the surrounding modernism. The Trio was written in 1946, and from Schoenberg's perch in Los Angeles, a feeling of victory over his former home would have been understandable.

But perhaps this characterization of the Trio's waltz is too paradoxical. Schoenberg's rejection of Vienna was never intended to be a rejection of *everything* Viennese. Better than most, Schoenberg understood the incomplete nature of any identity, and translated that sensibility into his compositions. The waltz is first introduced in the Trio by material in measure 81, with the instruction *Quasi Recitativo*—"a little like a recitative." An eighteenth and nineteenth century operatic term, the recitative allows a solo voice to "speak"—singing the same few tones over simple accompaniment with the rhythm of natural speech, often in order to convey plot development difficult to understand in an accompanying aria. Thus, recitatives in nineteenth century operas live part-way between speaking and singing, not unlike Schoenberg's *Sprechstimme*. Sometimes, a recitative reveals the private thoughts of a character, or allows a character to speak directly to the audience. Like Moses, the characters of a classical recitative are halfway between worlds, acting as part of the scene but also in conversation with the audience. In the Trio, Schoenberg's use of *quasi recitativo* removes the waltz from its position embedded within serialism and suggests it as a commentary, akin to a character from classical opera sharing a secret with the audience. In this, it becomes almost like allegory, reminding the listener of the composer's origins and acknowledging the musical debt Schoenberg would always have for his birthplace.

Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* takes as inspiration the swirl of intellectual energy within Viennese Jewish modernism. It deals with the pitfalls of German Jewish identity, the uncertainty of language and communicability, and the unresolvable dialectics of modernity. These are weighty issues, and yet, Schoenberg is comfortable in their ambiguity. He moves over them with a grace and poise unavailable to his philosophical contemporaries. In Schoenberg's hands, music becomes the space where the unresolvable can coexist, where the incommunicable can be reformulated, and where negative dialectics can retain the momentum they lose in more conventional critical theory. Most of Schoenberg's contemporaries saw the questions before them as tragic, and the solutions as empty. In *Moses und Aron*, Schoenberg takes this despair and cynicism and fashions it into one of the most compelling, propulsive, and moving operas of the twentieth century.

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