

Being, Becoming, and Death in Twelve-Tone Music: “Wie bin ich froh!” as Epitaph

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Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
Every poem an epitaph.
— T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” from *Four Quartets* (1942)

The specter of death hangs over much of Theodor Adorno’s discussion of twelve-tone music in his *Philosophy of New Music* (1949). In perhaps his clearest connection between death and this music, Adorno writes of a twelve-tone chord in Alban Berg’s 1935 opera *Lulu*: “Just as Lulu in the world of gapless semblance longs only for the arrival of her murderer and finds him in that chord, so does all harmony of denied happiness . . . long for the fatal chord as a cipher of fulfillment. Fatal, because in this chord every dynamic is stilled without being resolved. The law of complementary harmony already implies the end of the musical experience of time.”¹ I will engage here in an exploration of Adorno’s juxtaposition of death and twelve-tone music as it pertains to the analysis of twelve-tone music, using the perhaps curious choice of Anton Webern’s “Wie bin ich froh!” (Op. 25 No. 1, 1933) as an exemplar.

The alignment of the twelve-tone chord and Lulu’s murder are not mere coincidence: Adorno finds in the chord’s “stilling of every dynamic” an enactment of death beyond the action on stage. This is difficult to argue on its face: to deny the experience of time is to deny something fundamentally human, something that underscores all other human experience (sensual, emotional, mental, and so on) until its end in death. The chord dampens the tendency of any of its tones toward “movement” to other tones: it lacks the selective directionality of tonal music’s appellative consonances, and it lacks post-tonal music’s tendency toward complementarity, the avoidance of pitch-class repetition in too close a temporal proximity—all of which Adorno labels “the

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music* (1949), trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 65.

instinctual life of sounds.”² The twelve-tone chord nullifies any possibility of meaningful harmonic impetus by virtue of its very completeness.

Adorno begins to extrapolate the deathly implications of a twelve-tone chord and its immobility to twelve-tone music, referring to the “deferral” and “abdication” of a musical subject that underlies each work, experiencing its own sense of the passage of time.³ Yet this transference is not nearly so simple. To associate the enactment of this music with the enactment of death is to deny the music’s potential to *become*, to recursively and memorably generate itself *from* itself over time. Death is the cessation of a subject’s ability to do exactly that, to construct a narrative of one’s own self and to act in ways that impact the future determination of that narrative. What is twelve-tone music, after all, but for an intensely intertwined world of transformations (becomings) all related to one another through fundamental relationships of interval and order?⁴

This is not to say that there is no “becoming” in death. To that organism, however, the becoming in death is not a transformation

² Ibid., 66.

³ Ibid., 87.

⁴ Some nuance on the nature of “becoming” is relevant here. I use “becoming” in the sense that Henri Bergson, a French *fin de siècle* philosopher, does. As in Adorno’s writings on twelve-tone music, Bergson frequently concerns himself with the nature and experience of time, noting that reference to experience is naturally discontinuous, whereas lived, in-the-moment experience (*durée*, or “duration”) is continuous. (Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* [1889], trans. F.L. Pogson [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950], 219, 129, 131). To Bergson, “becoming” relies on a situational, adaptive memory that accretes autobiographical information about an organism as it lives continuously in time, “import[ing] the past into the present, contract[ing] into a single intuition many moments of duration.” Analysis, a sort of which Adorno engages in with twelve-tone music in his writings, is an *account* of experience that, even at its most minutely phenomenological, can never “catch” experience’s time.

In the field of music theory specifically, Janet Schmalfeldt has engaged deeply with the notion of “becoming” in early nineteenth-century analytical and formal practice in *In the Process of Becoming: Analytic and Philosophical Perspectives on Form in Early Nineteenth-Century Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

of what is within (emotions, thoughts, sensations), but rather *material*—the dust-to-dust breakdown and transformation of those organic compounds that make up bodily tissue into something more elemental.⁵ The body is definitively reciprocal. As *fin de siècle* philosopher Henri Bergson writes, the body is not only influenced by others, but also actively influences in its own right.⁶ Though it may be possible for others agents to act on the tissues and compounds that comprise a physical body after its death, by nature, a dead body is incapable of willful action, of fulfilling its potential to influence other objects, its decomposition cannot be a *material* becoming, one that has an effect on the set of images defining and re-defining an organism; rather, it becomes a *thing* that merely *is*, instead of matter that acts.

It is difficult to imagine a musical work, twelve-tone or not, that does *not* transformationally become in such a way as to broadly deny a true first-person enactment of death—for it is an uncommon piece of music that, before or after Schoenberg, does not recursively draw from within, from its own immediate past as a work, to generate its continuing present.⁷ Our consideration of the

⁵ Even the term “material,” however, exceeds what this “becoming” is. In Bergson’s sense of the word, “matter” involves not only an aggregation of perceived images (visual, sonic, etc.) in the world, but also an organism’s potential for action upon that aggregation of images. Calling any deathly becoming “material,” then, betrays the Bergsonian notion of the word. Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, xi, 7–8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷ This statement places agency in the hands of the music, and this is very much intended. This article broadly adopts David Lewin’s transformational “stance” toward music, the “attitude of someone *inside* the music, as idealized dancer and/or singer.” Although I view this internal subject as separate from the subject of the composer or poet or listener (see Chapter 1 of my dissertation, “Song as Self: Music and Subjectivity in the Early Twentieth-Century Lyric Lied” [University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2013]), those wishing to attribute agency to some creator may find that this “someone inside the music” is a reflection of that creator, who also recursively drew upon his or her own past as creator to develop the work. David Lewin, *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 159. Certainly my emphasis on the Lewinian frame of mind is not meant to deny the efforts of others—Lawrence Zbikowski and Jonathan Dunsby come to mind—who have tackled twentieth-century song analysis. Rather, I prioritize Lewin’s perspective because of the transformational

apparent conflict between Adorno's insistence upon the deathly nature of twelve-tone music and that music's intensely concentrated self-transformations will take us through a brief review of "Wie bin ich froh!", its musical processes, and its poem; to the poetic genre of epitaph; and finally to an unusual commentary on and nuancing of Adorno's approach to twelve-tone music from the unexpected source of Martin Heidegger. In the following pages, I will show that Adorno's supposition of an "abdicated" or abandoned subject position is both abstractly logical and practically untenable. The subject persists in twelve-tone serialism, though it is always and simultaneously "dying" in a particularly distinctive fashion.

Song as Epitaph

We begin with a brief review of the music itself, and what it seems to say and do; this in turn will inform a slightly more detailed—and potentially multivarious—reading of the poem. Ex. 1 reproduces the score of the song. "Wie bin ich froh!" at first blush, is not a subject's musical enactment of death. The song's formal division into two halves and a coda results from self-referencing formal musical processes very much akin to those in other songs that "become" in ways familiar to us from non-serial repertoires. Together with the poetic text, these processes create an anxiety-laden drama, but on the face of it, nothing about this song's text or music suggests a subject's abandonment of itself. Several of these processes are important to note for our analytical purposes. I will withhold discussion of the twelve-tone row of the song until later, emphasizing instead some of the song's salient features outside of the externally determined row in hopes of approaching the song on its own generative terms.

approach's neat fit with Bergsonian becoming and the philosophical stances on death and transformation that are forthcoming later in the article.

Example 1. Anton Webern, "Wie bin ich froh!" from „3 Lieder für
Gesang und Klavier, op. 25“

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Langsam ♩ = ca 60 rit. - - tempo rit. - -

Gesang
Voice

Wie bin ich froh!
What great de-light!

Piano

noch ein-mal wird mir al-les grün und
Once more now all the greens un-furled and

leuch-tet so! noch ü-ber-
shines so bright! And still the

7 *f* *rit.* *tempo*
 blüh- die Blu- men mir die Weit! noch ein -
 world_ is o - ver - groun with flow'rs! - Once more

9 *f* *rit.*
 mal_ bin ich ganz ins Wer- den hin- ge - stellt
 I_ in cre - a - tion's por - tal two my hours,

11 *pp* *sehr langsam* *ca 42* *tempo I*
 und bin auf Er- den.
 and yet am mor- tal.

Chief among the song's most noticeable musical traits is the piano's rhythmic pattern. Ex. 2 shows the motivic rhythm(s) of the piano introduction: a rotation comprised of four gestures, which Webern often beams against the notated meter, comprises this motive. The first gesture, a sixteenth-note triplet, occurs as an anacrusis-like figure to the second gesture, comprised of two eighth notes. The third element in the rhythmic motive is a quarter note

followed by an eighth rest; this quarter note is unusual in the immediate context of the song because it sounds four pitches together, the first occurrence in the song of simultaneously-sounding pitches. Finally, another pair of eighth notes closes the rhythmic motive.

Example 2. Piano introduction, "Wie bin ich froh!"



Yet this precise model quickly becomes only an ideal, and never again appears with the same rhythmic/metric profile, nor in complete form. In fact, after the *Gesangstimme* enters in mm. 2, the piano accompaniment initiates a subtractive rhythmic process, deleting elements of the rhythmic profile of mm. 0.3–1 one by one. Using each recurrence of the sixteenth-note triplet as a starting point, Ex. 3 compares the rhythmic profile of the introduction with its next four rotations—such as they are. Each undergoes a progressive curtailment, in which elements of the motive drop off from its end and do not return. Following the near liquidation of the motive, the first section of the song ends with unprecedented silence from the piano over nearly two and a half empty beats.⁸

The *Gesangstimme*'s conclusion and ensuing silence in mm. 5.2–6.2 offers an opportunity for the piano accompaniment to regroup, to reorganize or revive its introduction. Yet the song immediately seems harried: a quarter-note tetrachord abruptly interjects on the weak half of mm. 5.2; it is unusual for its lack of a preceding triplet or eighth-note pair, and it is strikingly loud—*f*—where previous tetrachords had been *p*. If anything, the attempt at

⁸ Joseph N. Straus neatly summarizes this subtractive process over mm. 1–4 in his *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: 2000), 21.

a rhythmic regrouping in this measure of vocal silence is only that—an attempt. Such an attempt does seem immediately more viable with the piano's D–B–B triplet in mm. 5.3, but just as quickly another triplet appears in the left hand, transposed down by two semitones from the triplet immediately preceding it.

Example 3. Piano rhythmic motive and abbreviations, mm. 0.3–4.3

The image displays five systems of musical notation, each consisting of a treble and bass staff. The notation includes various dynamics, articulation marks, and triplet markings.

- ms. 0.3-1.3 (model):** Treble staff starts with a forte (*f*) triplet of eighth notes, followed by a sforzando (*sf*) quarter note and a piano (*p*) quarter note. The bass staff has a piano (*p*) triplet of eighth notes. A fermata is placed over the first measure.
- ms. 2.2-2.4:** Treble staff starts with a forte (*f*) triplet of eighth notes, followed by a piano (*p*) quarter note. The bass staff has a piano (*p*) triplet of eighth notes. A fermata is placed over the first measure.
- ms. 3:** Treble staff starts with a forte (*f*) triplet of eighth notes, followed by a piano (*p*) quarter note. The bass staff has a piano (*p*) triplet of eighth notes. A fermata is placed over the first measure.
- ms. 4.1-4.2:** Treble staff starts with a piano (*p*) triplet of eighth notes, followed by a piano (*p*) quarter note. The bass staff has a piano (*p*) triplet of eighth notes. A fermata is placed over the first measure.
- ms. 4.3:** Treble staff starts with a forte (*f*) triplet of eighth notes, followed by a piano (*p*) quarter note. The bass staff has a piano (*p*) triplet of eighth notes. A fermata is placed over the first measure.

Yet this triplet is not the only strangely repeated portion of the rhythmic motive during the *Gesangstimme*'s interlude; the quarter-note tetrachord is also repeated. If anything, this brief interlude—with its repeated tetrachord and its descending eighth-note pair—suggests a certain anxiety about its contents: displaced, unusually repeated gestures betray insecurities about the appropriateness of the model introduction's motivic components, particularly after their rather systematic elimination in the song's first section.

This hesitant, anxious interlude gives way to another subtractive rhythmic process in the second half of the song, as Ex. 4 demonstrates. The process again alters the appearance of the model introduction as the second half of the song unfolds. A second eighth note following G# is nowhere to be found in mm. 8.3. As in mm. 4.1–4.2, mm. 9.3–9.4 create an abbreviated version of the model that omits the tetrachord and metrically displaces the melodic apex. Finally, only the sixteenth triplet remains in mm. 10.1. The piano accompaniment, however, seems to restart the motive-abbreviation process yet again with a full restatement of the rhythmic motive starting in mm. 10.2.

It is not only the liquidation of the introduction's rhythmic figure that distinguishes the phrases of the song from one another. A second notable process in the song relates to register and phrase differentiation. The second full phrase in mm. 6–10 radically expands its register in the *Gesangstimme*, accomplishing a new beginning both reminiscent of and progressively differentiated from the first phrase. Where it was unusual in the first phrase for the *Gesangstimme* to span more than a major ninth in one direction at a time, the second phrase's melody spans wide swaths of pitch space: from G down a minor thirteenth to B in mm. 6–7, from B up a minor fourteenth to A in mm. 7, and with several relatively large and jarring contour changes in the following measures. There is also a certain calculated enforcement of phrase boundaries through tempo alterations: as the end of the first phrase nears in mm. 4–5, the *Gesangstimme* sings its last four notes under a *ritardando*; the original tempo resumes almost immediately and slows again at the close of the second phrase (mm. 10). *Ritardandi* also appear in mm. 3 and 8, aligning with the ends of subphrases and their respective tercets.

Example 4. Piano rhythmic motive and abbreviations, mm. 7.2–10.1

ms. 7.2-8.1 (model)

ms. 8.2-9.2

ms. 9.3-9.4

ms. 10.1

Phrase differentiation by virtue of rhythm and tempo remains as salient in this song as it would in any other song, tonal or not. Not coincidentally, these phrase differentiations also align with textual punctuation, as they very often do in tonal songs. The first such differentiation, mm. 3's subphrase-level ritardando, accompanies an emphatic exclamation point. The unpunctuated continuation of the poem's second and third lines comes across in the music's pressing-on through this line break. The next such phrase differentiation—slowed tempo and subsequent reset of rhythmic motive and register—occurs with line 3's exclamation point in mm. 5. Yet another subphrase ritardando occurs with mm.

8's exclamation point from poetic line 4. Lines 5–6 of the poem, like lines 2–3, have no punctuation separating them, but—in a reversal of the first phrase's gliding-over of a similar continuity—a wide gap emerges between lines 5–6 in the song. The second phrase's dynamic and tempo decrescendi in mm. 10 correspond with the end of poetic line 5, while line 6 seemingly comprises its own coda-like sequel. This sudden divorce of musical phrase from punctuation marks a significant crossroads—one that, as we will see, reveals a stunning fracture between the imagery of the poem and the state of its subject.

Several remarkable occurrences set apart the coda of the song from the two larger (and earlier) sections. The piano's premature resumption of the introduction figure in mm. 10.2–10.3 clashes with the *Gesangstimme's* imminent closure on “hingestellt” and its accompanying *ritardando*. The following measure's unparalleled pitch redundancy, as well as its further rhythmic displacements and its drastic tempo downgrade, underscore great demands on the *Gesangstimme*: it must sing a high B even as it decrescendos from *pianissimo*.

In its own way, Hildegard Jone's poetic text reinforces these sectional divisions:

1 Wie bin ich froh!
 2 Noch einmal wird mir alles grün
 3 und leuchtet so!
 4 Noch überblühn die Blumen mir die Welt!
 5 Noch einmal bin ich ganz ins Werden hingestellt
 6 und bin auf Erden.

1 How happy I am!
 2 Once again everything becomes green to me
 3 and shines so!
 4 Still the flowers blossom for me all over the world!
 5 Once again I am wholly placed into becoming
 6 and am on earth.

The poem's two tercets seem to encourage bipartite division in the song, but the score sequesters line 6 to a coda instead, suggesting that the second tercet requires internal distinction in addition to the existing differentiation between it and the preceding

tercet. The lines' layout in the song is but one of several structural contrasts between the tercets. The tercets' rhyme schemes—*aba* for the first tercet, *acd* for the second—highlight the awkward differences in syllabic weight between them. In the first, two four-syllable lines bookend line 2, which has eight syllables.

The two tercets are distinct not only in poetic form, but also in content. The opening line is an unusually direct statement of emotion, and one presumes that the reason for the poetic "I's" happiness follows in lines 2–3: the I basks in the radiance of nature, and whether it is nature or the I that is *re-vitalized* ("*noch einmal* wird mir ...") there seems to be a symbiosis of happiness and greenness.⁹ Yet an alternative interpretation is also possible: rather than explaining or recalling—perhaps accurately, perhaps not—the source of its happiness as the shining greenness of the world, this I's recognition of happiness is perhaps instead the catalyst for the seeming lushness of its environment. This case, after all, would be but one manifestation of the notion that emotions and feelings impact subsequent perceptions—that the I sees the world through green-colored glasses.¹⁰

Jone's language lends credence to the world's greenness as *arising from* the I's happiness rather than causing it. "Alles," everything, is the grammatical subject of line 2: as totality, "alles" exists prior to any specific "me" (mir) culled from that entirety. Thus, when "everything" becomes green and shines, it does so "*to* me." "Mir" as a (grammatical) direct object is passive: greening and shining is not *under/gone by* me, but rather *be/comes* (wird) *to* me, a subtle distinction that draws attention to this I's determination of its surroundings on the basis of what it already "has in mind." Similarly, line 4's "mir" is a passive one: for me, to me, in my world, flowers "over-bloom." The poem's apex of passivity, however, is line 5: "once again I am ... placed into becoming." The

⁹ I use the terms "I" and "poetic I" in poetic analysis, rather than the "poet" label favored by critics such as Northrop Frye and T.S. Eliot, to more clearly indicate first-person agents. It seems to me that "poet" and "I," read rather strictly, occupy different, though sometimes overlapping, ontological planes.

¹⁰ Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1999), 37, 147–148.

construction “am placed” (bin hingestellt) implies that the I is ultimately not the agent that “places” itself “into becoming:” it is placed there (“once again!”) by something else. The line also implies that the I had, to that point, *not* been “in becoming.” This is alarming, for Bergson’s interpretation of material becoming teaches us that the subject is constantly in the process of becoming.¹¹ One does not “place” oneself into becoming—one is always already there.

Could this linguistic emphasis on passivity, then, be a textual marker of Adorno’s association of death with the alleged totality of twelve-tone music? Likely not. Though the passivity of the poem recalls the inability of a dead person to interact with (i.e., influence or act upon) those outside of its body, a certain passivity is actually inherent in the realization of subjectivity. Nick Mansfield notes that the etymology of “subject” involves something that is “placed under” something else—that the subject inevitably links to something outside of itself on which it always and necessarily depends for self-definition.¹² Similarly, the greening and shining’s *be/coming* to the I emphasizes the subject’s immobility, its necessity to perceive (“take in”) another for its own viability. No doubt a subject can also “set others under” itself. The poem is remarkable in its emphasis on the passivity of the subject, for there is little influential action branching from the I to that I’s others. This, perhaps, owes much to the supposition and fear of what death—the total lack of influence—could “be like,” according to this subject.

Whether poetic lines 2–3 refer to the source or the effects of the I’s initially recognized feeling of happiness, the second tercet adds an ominous note. The flowers of the I’s world do not merely bloom: they literally *over*-bloom (überblühn), bloom in excess. Similarly, “noch” at the beginning of line 4 contrasts unfavorably with previous and subsequent uses of the word in lines 2 and 5 (as “noch einmal,” “once again”). “Noch” (“still”) indicates a certain impatience or disbelief—perhaps anxiety—associated with the

¹¹ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 197.

¹² Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 3.

flowers' over-blooming. To the I, these flowers encompass all perceptions (die Welt).

It is unclear whether lines 5 and 6 show an exacerbation of anxiety or a rejection of it. The poem's tone shifts greatly in the last line. Line 6's initial "and" connects it to the previous line and suggests that "being on earth" is a parallel condition to "being placed into becoming." This juxtaposition serves, perhaps, as an affirmation of a spiritual element in the material—a theme common to Jone¹³—or perhaps as simple reassurance, a calming reminder (in the words of Monty Python's plague-stricken wretch) that "I'm not dead yet." More than anything, however, the ambiguity of the final lines derives from what this subject means to be "placed into becoming." This becoming seems to be parallel to that of line 2, in which "everything becomes green" to the "I"; both lines, after all, note that this becoming is not new ("noch einmal"). That the I is (passively) placed into becoming suggests, importantly, that becoming is not the I's default mode of existence. That becoming might not be this uttering subject's primary mode of existence is difficult to reconcile: in music just as well as in poetry, and no less so in this music and this poem, generative processes of recursive becoming are so common as to warrant near-default status. One does not *become* only when one cannot *constitute* oneself, cannot *represent* oneself (to oneself or to any other) as an entity capable of action on its perceptions and memories. Yet this song and its components clearly function, on many levels, in and as such becoming.

Stay, Traveler

In its anxiety toward becoming-a-thing, Jone's poem—and, to some extent, lyric poetry at large—has a deep kinship with epitaph. William Waters summarizes the nature of epitaphic poetry as a conflict between impulses of continuation and cessation, noting

¹³ See Lauriejean Reinhardt, "Ich und du und alle": Hildegard Jone, Ferdinand Ebner, and Webern's *Drei Gesänge*, Op. 23," *Revista de Musicologia* 16 (1993): 3766–3782; and "Webern's Literary Encounter with Hildegard Jone," *Mitteilungen der Paul Sacher Stiftung* 5 (1992): 36–40.

that epitaph relies strongly on the voice not only of its creator, but also of its reader.¹⁴ Epitaph's classic model is the "Stay, traveler!" injunction issued by a roadside gravestone, followed by lament, didacticism, reflection, forewarning, and so on. In a sense, the epitaphic poem becomes a gesture toward immortality: as long as a present human voice revives it, its original generative poetic I lives again, however briefly: "the 'immortality' of poetry is not in the monument [e.g., gravestone, but more widely the poetic artifact as monument] but in the breath and voice of the reader."¹⁵ The poetic monument marking death, which is always just a thing and not influential matter, strives constantly for becoming, for resurrection by another. It may become as soon as a reader creates and sustains an imprint of the epitaph through reading; the reader, that is, finally answers the poetic I's extension toward another. In constantly seeking this material revivification, "the epitaph forever defends a voice that it also, ceaselessly, hopes to ambush."¹⁶ Yet the interaction of monument/epitaph with its reader is only briefly reciprocal: beyond its immediate influence on the reader and the reader's potential subsequent action upon the monument/epitaph, that monument/epitaph cannot respond—it is, in Waters's words, "an automaton ... devoid of self."¹⁷ As a result, "the I [of the epitaphic poem] is not the 'great part' of the author himself that [he] hoped he had lodged in his lasting poem, but instead, unexpectedly, the I of the reader."¹⁸

When read as an epitaph, Jone's poem extends beyond an ode to radiant nature and a reading of the spiritual in the material. Instead, the poem—and indeed the song—becomes deeply metaphorical, a first-person commentary on the epitaphic nature of the artwork. The two "noch einmals" of lines 2 and 5 become important: particularly in the absence of any other stimuli explaining the (revived) happiness of the I, simply the poem itself—and specifically that the poem *is being read*—is sufficient to

¹⁴ William Waters, *Poetry's Touch: On Lyric Address* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 106, 114.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

create happiness and its resulting lush world. What anxious poetic I would not be happy to be so revived, to engage in such commerce with an other—any other? Yet the poem, as inanimate artifact, and its subject cannot simply will themselves into becoming: they must *be-come*, must (passively) be “placed into becoming” by someone or something else. As Waters implies, that subject (the one who *does* the placing) is none other than the reader.¹⁹

“Poetry’s contact through print,” writes Waters, “is in all salient ways identical to contact through a gravestone inscription. The reader is utterly close to the poet in her word-by-word responsiveness to his writing and, at the same time, irrevocably beyond his reach.”²⁰ One might just as well replace “poem” with “song:” the manner in which song materially-becomes is through reading, whether silent or sounded aloud. Like a poem’s reading, a song’s reading is double in nature: not only does a reader outside of the work recite and thus revive its subject, but the content of the work tends to *read itself* in the process of progressively generating the rest of the work—referring recursively to poetic and songful moments already past, at its basis the essence of becoming. To the external reader of a song, and like the printed poem, the “monumental” score admits its reader into the briefest of dialogues. “Stay, traveler,” it calls; “sing me, hear me—I have much to say.” And when the reader obliges, no reply comes—the invitation may just as well have been “sing yourself, hear yourself.”

In terms of a subject enacting—living out in song—the components of its self, this is a disappointing interpretation, one that views the performer(s) as bellows and the song as pipes, a mechanistic setup that falls silent as soon as one of the two is removed from the formula. The divide between performers and a song’s subject is never so wide as it is in an epitaph; an even more distancing gap occurs between a song’s subject and a different reader, the listener. The listener does not reanimate the subject through performance but rather—in turning a mirror on a mirror—may receive that reanimation passively from another source, may actually be “placed into becoming.”

¹⁹ Ibid., 121.

²⁰ Ibid., 125.

The poetic text of “Wie bin ich froh!” magnifies the divide between reader and poem-subject by calling attention to it, and reacting anxiously to it, in an *actually* epitaphic text; as such, it is a song about song, about poetry, about music—about art. But this macrocosmic level is not the one at which Adorno levels his critique of twelve-tone music. His accusations seem to center around musical materials and the processes by which they concatenate, arguing that these materials and processes leave no room for the dynamic, recursive subject. Can “Wie bin ich froh!”, with its focus on and problematizing of that uneasy space between being-a-thing and transformational becoming, get us any closer to an enactment of death when we consider its specifically twelve-tone serial workings?

Beginnings, Endings, and Knowings

Like Waters with the epitaphic poem, Adorno often describes twelve-tone music in automaton terms, as if the music had no self and therefore little control over the procession of its utterance. Adorno’s interpretation of this music as “objective,”²¹ as something that does not actively construct itself *from* itself, therefore implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) ties it not only to subjective aporia but also to death—or rather deadness, the quality of being dead. This connection arises in part from the nature of prescribed pitch and interval-class succession, but also from some of the logical implications of Adorno’s thoughts about twelve-tone harmony.

Adorno’s discussion of the “fatal” twelve-tone chord in *Lulu* relies on the assumption that (register-specific) pitches are representatives of their respective pitch classes, and thereby constitute a totality in which “every dynamic is stilled without being resolved.”²² This lack or falloff of impetus, of course, is like death’s universal defeat of motility at even the cellular level. Adorno specifically equates the full pitch-class inventory of both a twelve-

²¹ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 42, 56.

²² *Ibid.*, 65.

tone chord's "vertical/harmonic" element and twelve-tone serial music's "horizontal/melodic" as different manifestations of the totalistic unit of the row.²³ This formulation is common for Adorno: elsewhere he describes "the equivalence of the vertical and the horizontal" as the "abolish[ment of] the fundamental contradiction" between polyphony/fugue and homophony/sonata, or the "divergence" of time and interval.²⁴

Adorno views continuance—both melodic and harmonic—beyond the level of the single row to be arbitrary; this arbitrariness, this inability for elements within the music itself to determine or predict what can/should/will follow it, "gives the impression that once completed, the twelve-tone row has ... no *impulse* to continue and is driven forward only by manipulation external to it."²⁵ In the absence of pitch-class hierarchies, there is no imperative row-form to which the music must proceed following the completion of one row-form. Webern and others sometimes attempted such a large-scale determination of row-forms by limiting the number of row-forms in the work, by laying out the row-forms symmetrically, or by deriving the succession of row-forms from some property of an original row. Regardless, as Adorno writes, such succession in the end depends on external manipulation.

This is not to say, however, that this music does not "predict" itself in any way. Twelve-tone serialism's distinctive *modus operandi* is a consistent, ordered succession of interval classes; this emphasis on interval led Schoenberg to call this method of composition the "method of composing with twelve tones which are related only with one another."²⁶ In other words, once the first and second pitch classes (or more, as necessary) of a row-form materialize, the remaining pitch classes become inevitable because of the consistent temporal ordering of directed intervals. This leads Adorno to characterize twelve-tone serial melody as dealing only

²³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link* (1968), trans. Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 66.

²⁴ Adorno, *Alban Berg*, 66; *Philosophy of New Music*, 45, 59, 65.

²⁵ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 59; emphasis added.

²⁶ Arnold Schoenberg, "Composition with Twelve Tones (I)" (1941), trans. Leo Black, in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 218.

with beginnings and endings, since its “middles” are more or less prescribed by previous appearance(s) of the row.²⁷ Adorno’s conception of “beginnings and endings” is a limited one, however, for his purposes: while he bases the apparent loss of tonal motility in twelve-tone music on a negative comparison to the teleological orientation of tonal music toward one pitch class, he does not extend the comparison to formal units. For Adorno, it seems, a formal unit and its ending in tonal music are by definition intertwined in this teleological organization, but the formal unit and ending in twelve-tone music, because of its utter lack of such orientation, must rely on something other organization or teleology, or on nothing at all.

This inability of twelve-tone music to *act on itself*—to have no choice in what follows—leads Adorno to a number of radical assertions. He states, for instance, that twelve-tone technique “subjugates music by setting it free”—a nod both to this music’s antithesis in the inevitable gravitation of tonal music and to twelve-tone music’s prescriptive nature—and that “the new order, twelve-tone technique, virtually extinguishes the subject.”²⁸ As we have seen, subjectivity both conscious and unconscious inescapably imprints song in becoming: it is the combination of a song’s recursive self-reference/memory and action on those references to generate further song that is so keenly *subject-ive*.²⁹ Yet Adorno’s implied casting of tonal music as an other is an uncomfortable one, for “continuance” in tonal music is also rather arbitrary, as Adorno himself recognizes; as Joseph N. Straus puts it, “a good composer doesn’t just lay [row]-forms end-to-end any more than Mozart simply strings scales together.”³⁰ The possibilities for, and tendencies of, formal-unit endings in these repertoires illustrate their contrasts: tonal music defines its endings through a variety of factors, but perhaps chiefly through contrapuntal relationships to a

²⁷ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 59.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 54, 56.

²⁹ Putting it another way, Adorno writes that “musical organization is passed to autonomous subjectivity by virtue of the technical principle of development.” *Philosophy of New Music*, 46.

³⁰ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 59; Straus, *An Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, 153.

tonic and textural, rhythmic, and metric impulses that underline and reinforce those contrapuntal relationships.³¹ On the other hand, Adorno seems to assume that twelve-tone works define their endings based not on an orientation towards a certain ending pitch, but rather on the exhaustion of the twelve pitch classes, a sort of anti-tonic impulse. Once a tonal unit reaches an ending of some kind, the ensuing unit is not typically limitless in terms of its potential beginnings: certain pitch classes' relationships to a tonic or involvement in the works' motivic profiles, for instance, mean that certain pitch classes are more likely to begin a subsequent musical unit than others are. It is by constructing continuances, connections between its formal units based on memory—of a tonic, of a motive, etc.—that tonal music uses *itself*, its past, to further generate itself. This is not necessarily the case for twelve-tone serial works; according to Adorno, once an “ending” occurs after the exhaustion of the twelve pitch classes, no necessary relationship to any one of those twelve pitch classes, and no binding commitment to a motivic or intervallic profile, facilitates a new utterance beginning on any given pitch class. Continuance, in other words, is out of the music's hands, and this makes such twelve-tone music—in Bergson's sense of the term—*immaterial*, a thing, capable of no action aside from the action performed upon it by an other. This powerlessness is the source for the subject's “extinguishing,” according to Adorno; writing specifically of Webern's twelve-tone music, Adorno says that “the musical subject, falling silent, abdicates.”³²

But Adorno's sense of beginnings, endings, and continuances for twelve-tone music is severely limiting. Where tonal analysis's descriptive language regarding formal units with varying degrees of

³¹ Schoenberg writes that “coherence in classic compositions is based—broadly speaking—on the unifying qualities of such structural factors as rhythms, motifs, phrases, and the constant reference of all melodic and harmonic features to the center of gravitation—the tonic.” As for his own music, however, he writes that “renouncement of the unifying power of the tonic still leaves all the other factors in operation.” “My Evolution” (1949), trans. Leo Black, in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 87.

³² Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 87.

scale and closure traffics in rhetorical terms (phrase, period, sentence, cadence) and measures of completeness and incompleteness (half cadence, full cadence), twelve-tone analysis's language often falls to set-theoretical vocabulary focused solely on one degree of unitary completion (complementation, aggregation, and so on). Scale and closure are non-factors in Adorno's description of formal units in twelve-tone music, for he does not import into his serial interpretations the *textural* changes that so clearly mark formal units in tonal music—changes such as registral shifts, changes in harmonic rhythm, dynamic change, and so on.

Jone's poetic text heightens the discrepancy between the rhetorical differentiation of formal units and the accretive differentiation of pitch-class collections. While the effusive imagery, unpunctuated line-to-line continuation, and concomitant musical continuity of mm. 3–5 (lines 2–3) suggest the unrestrained pouring-forth of subjective feeling that creates such a tense opposition with lyric constructivism, the effect of the corresponding lines in the second tercet (lines 5–6) is utterly different. Here, the markers of carefully considered and constructed utterance are everywhere—in the closely proximal internal rhyme of “Werden/Erden,” in the strangely enforced *ritardando* between unpunctuated lines, in the odd resetting of the piano's rhythmic motive in mm. 10.2. The effect is like that of grinding gears: there is a newly begun rhythmic motive in the middle of a phrase-ending and delineating *ritardando*; the *ritardando* splits two lines of poetry that have no noticeable delineation outside of the visual line break; and finally, tempo and motive reset in mm. 12. If the end of the first phrase perfectly encapsulates the first tercet as a phrase or thought of revival, the end of the second phrase and the coda just as well encapsulate the utterer's descent into anxiety and ultimate hopelessness for that revival's sustainability—particularly as the I speaks the dreadful, epiphanic, epitaphic “und bin auf Erden.”

These beginnings and endings at both the subphrase and phrase level owe relatively little to the use of row-forms. Ex. 5

shows the first row-form of the song, $P_{F\sharp G}$,³³ but this analytical “unit” means little in terms of the song’s formal and textual organization, for Webern rarely matches the beginning or end of a row-form with the beginning or end of a phrase or subphrase, whether musical or textual, in this song. Ex. 6 shows the most noticeable instance of this non-coincidence in mm. 4–5: the *Gesangstimme*, having cycled through the inventory of twelve pitch classes, begins a new row-form in mm. 4.4 and completes the phrase only four notes later. The row-form initiated in mm. 4.4 is the same one as the *Gesangstimme* sang beginning at mm. 2.1, though there are variations in the register of some of its pitch classes. Perhaps more surprising than this immediate row-form repetition is its abbreviation in the *Gesangstimme*: after only four notes, the *Gesangstimme* reaches the last note/syllable of the third line, passing the remainder of the row-form to the piano—an exchange unprecedented in the song to this point.

Example 5. $P_{F\sharp G}$, mm. 0.3–2.2

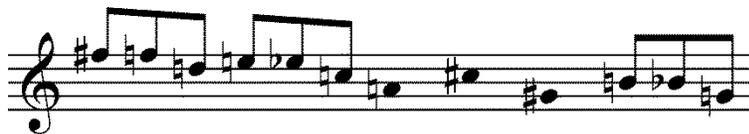


³³ This labeling system for twelve-tone row-forms is my own. Standard row-type abbreviations remain (P for prime, R for retrograde, I for inversion, RI for retrograde inversion), but the subscript portion of any row-form label includes both the row’s starting pitch class and its ending pitch class. I believe this to be essential information in this song.

Example 6. Non-coincidence of phrase ending and row-form ending (mm. 3–5) (Arabic numerals are row ordinal numbers)

The incommensurability of row “completion” and phrase completion also plays out on a smaller level of detail, in conjunction with the piano rhythmic motive’s gradual decays. The sixteenth-note triplets of each phrase are already the most ubiquitous element of the rhythmic motive, and their continued recurrence argues for their significance as formal markers. Yet again, however, ordinal position and/or aggregation do not coincide with these formal markers. While the sixteenth-note triplets in mm. 0.3 and 2.1 each involve the first, second, and third ordinal pitch classes of their respective rows ($P_{F\#-G}$ and $RI_{G-G\#}$), the triplet of mm. 3.1 comprises the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth pitch classes of $RI_{G-G\#}$. The triplet in mm. 4.1 features the sixth, seventh, and eighth pitch classes of $P_{F\#-G}$, while the triplet of mm. 5.3 comprises the seventh, eighth, and ninth pitch classes of $RI_{G-G\#}$. The sixteenth-note triplets, despite their high degrees of similarity, map onto multiple manifestations of that interval-class pattern within the row, belying any attempt at assigning either the rhythmic or the intervallic pattern to a single ordinal or aggregational correspondence. Ex. 7, for instance, shows the prevalence of the interval-class content within $P_{F\#-G}$.

Example 7a. Prevalence of $-1/3$ contour in $P_{F\sharp-G}$;
beams show trichords with this contour



Example 7b. Interval classes 1, 3, and 4 in another manifestation
($-3/+4$ beamed)



The Gesangstimme's immediate repetition of its row-form in mm. 2–5 is, for the song, nothing unusual. The piano introduction and first phrase (mm. 0.3–5), in fact, use only $P_{F\sharp-G}$ and $RI_{G-G\sharp}$, while the second phrase includes only their retrogrades ($R_{G-F\sharp}$ and $I_{G\sharp-G}$), with the exception of $RI_{G-G\sharp}$ in mm. 9–11.³⁴ This exception is significant: surrounded by $R_{G-F\sharp}$ and $I_{G\sharp-G}$ from mm. 6 to the end of the song, the surprising $RI_{G-G\sharp}$ interval-class pattern—a pattern associated with the first phrase—perhaps portends the drastically anxious turn of the song and other disruptive acts between the second phrase and coda (the piano's rhythmic motive restart, the sudden tempo change in mm. 11, and so on). The song, then, strips to its essence the workings of twelve-tone machination: in a style of composition in which a 144-cell matrix of 48 directional rows can conceptually map “all” possible pitch-class successions, “Wie bin ich froh!” uses only four of those rows (23 cells) to make its point.

³⁴ Kathryn Bailey, *The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern: Old Forms in a New Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 50; Donald Chittum, “Some Observations on the Row Technique in Webern's Opus 25,” *Current Musicology* 12 (1971): 97.

After all, with only one P, R, I, and RI row-form in the song—and with the rows in the P/R and I/RI pairs each exact retrogrades of one another—the succession and direction of interval classes (to some extent, directed intervals) is, for all intents, summarized: the rest would be but transpositions. Fig. 1 shows a visual representation of the song’s row-form selection; in terms of the compositional matrix, the intersecting rows indicate the encapsulation of the “all possible” interval-class successions.

Figure 1. Matrix cross-section showing all row-forms of “Wie bin ich froh!”

									I ↓				
P →	F \sharp	F	D	E	E	C	A	C \sharp	G \sharp	B	B	G	← R
									A				
									C				
									B				
									B				
									D				
									F				
									C \sharp				
									F \sharp				
									D \sharp				
									E				
									G				
									RI ↑				

Indeed, these four row-forms summarize a certain “all possible” knowledge of the song’s melodic material, namely interval classes between successive individual pitch classes (one “way” or another). Many other kinds of knowledge about the song—the demarcation criteria and “succession” of rhythmic and phrase units come to mind—are *not* available via anything learned from the four row-form. In their embedded knowledge about pitch and interval in the song, though, the four row-forms recall one of Schoenberg’s foundational reflections on the nature of twelve-tone composition: “the employment of [the four] mirror forms [P, I, R, RI] corresponds to the principle of *the absolute and unitary perception of musical space*.”³⁵ Earlier in the same essay, he defines “the two-or-more-dimensional space in which musical ideas are presented [as] a unit,” noting that “the elements of a musical idea are partly incorporated in the horizontal plane as successive sounds, and partly in the vertical plane as simultaneous sounds.”³⁶ Such a “musical space” is clearly an a priori one, a property of the row; realizations within that musical space, however, are totalities that only exist in full after something has ended. Schoenberg’s concept of musical-space perception as “absolute and unitary” nonetheless does not rule out its applicability either for a subject formed in, by, and with the music. Schoenberg invariably links memory and repetition as the enablers of music’s comprehensibility;³⁷ the subject within a song, after all, establishes its immediacy with the listener through its close relationship (just-as, just-like) with the listener’s own human processes.³⁸ Though serial “repetition” may not ever be literally the same succession of pitches and rhythms

³⁵ Schoenberg, “Composition with Twelve Tones (I),” 225.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 219.

³⁷ Arnold Schoenberg, “New Music: My Music” (c. 1930), trans. Leo Black, in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975), 103. The conflict is an old one, between the spatial interpretation of form as a container into which music pours (“blocks” and “clock time,” famously derided by Bergson as spatial rather than temporal) and the experiential/durational. But as the operations of memory demonstrate, one is not possible without the other: the potential for acting upon a memory—durational becoming—requires there to be a *unit* of memory in the first place.

³⁸ For more on identification (“being like”) with and in music, albeit in an operatic context, see Brian Hyer’s “Parsifal hystérique,” *Opera Quarterly* 22 (2006): 269–320.

(etc.), a row's signature successions of interval classes constitute sensory data for memory—and therefore transformation by a subject.³⁹

Murray Dineen approaches the question of “musical space” from Schoenberg's concept of the “contrapuntal combination,” a notion Schoenberg first articulated in the context of tonal music. Dineen writes that “for Schoenberg the combination of a subject [a ‘musical idea’] with various counterpoints expresses the totality of a contrapuntal composition; each new counterpoint provides a new perspective on its subject... To know a contrapuntal composition well is to know all the combinations of subject and counterpoints—all the subject's facets and hence its shape from various contrapuntal perspectives—and to know this completely, as if from one unified perspective.”⁴⁰ The resulting musical space is multifaceted, and like a sculpture (or in the apocryphal case of a Schoenberg lecture, an old hat), is recognizable from a variety of perspectives.⁴¹ Such a contrapuntal combination does not exist *in* the music necessarily: the various components that make it up may “unravel” over the course of a work, and even then, all the possibilities inherent in a contrapuntal combination may not actualize. “Does this not suggest,” writes Dineen, “that the total combination is nontemporal, or *pretemporal* ... lying outside the measure of a piece?”⁴² The *totality* of musical (here, contrapuntal) possibility would indeed be non-temporal, for it would be the abstract sum total of all actualized and potential counterpoints to a given subject.

Dineen views Schoenberg's twelve-tone compositional method as stemming from a similarly multifaceted musical experience—that to “know a [twelve-tone] work well” would constitute knowledge of all its possible row-forms and their alterations of, or

³⁹ Bergson, too, views memory as constitutive of a subject, writing that “if we were only to ... eliminate all memory, we should pass thereby from the subject to the object.” *Matter and Memory*, 77.

⁴⁰ P. Murray Dineen, “The Contrapuntal Combination: Schoenberg's Old Hat,” in *Music Theory and the Exploration of the Past*, ed. Christopher Hatch and David W. Bernstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 435–436.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 435.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 440.

“perspectives” on, one another.⁴³ As a “unified spatial experience” similar in nature to tonal contrapuntal combinations, however, the pairing of a twelve-tone row with selected derived forms (transpositions, retrogrades, inversions, or retrograde inversions of itself) acting as contrapuntal combinations would be too “facile” because of twelve-tone composition’s dismissal of the consonance/dissonance distinction.⁴⁴ In Dineen’s view, contrapuntal commentaries on a twelve-tone subject do not provide the potential actions constituting the contrapuntal combination as they do in tonal music because of those commentaries’ origination in the very same row they would counter. Rather, twelve-tone music’s “unified spatial experience” involves the row itself as a unit, and the twelve-by-twelve matrix as an abstract summation of possibilities. The row is not a thing to be added to or commented upon (“facilely”), but is rather the thing itself, already containing all possible combinations with and commentaries on itself by virtue of twelve-tone composition’s rigorous transformations.

This view of twelve-tone aggregation as discernible and identifiable from a variety of temporal perspectives requires nuancing, however, when it comes to Webern’s serialism. The aggregation of the row in “Wie bin ich froh!” occurs both horizontally and vertically—that is, both over time (melodically) and simultaneously (harmonically). The *process* of aggregation, then—according to which a unit of perception in twelve-tone musical space delineates itself and forms a totality—opens up to perspectivalism. On completion of the aggregate and the beginning of a new row-form, the possibilities are wide-ranging: even after the first pitch sounds, any one of four row-form classes could follow, and each successive pitch narrows the focus and possibility of what might occur next, at least until aggregation is complete. The conceptual “shape” of these row-forms as they become, then, is conical, paralleling exactly Bergson’s famous conical representation of memory’s effect on the present: a wide sum total of possible applicable memories narrows and focuses constantly

⁴³ Ibid., 444, 445.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 445.

into the present moment. Adorno's comment about twelve-tone music dealing only with beginnings and endings rings particularly true on this point; the music itself has a large amount of control over what occurs after each first and second (etc.) pitch class of a row-form, based on its inherent recollection of rows past—but little to no control over what occurs after the last pitch class of a row-form. At the juncture of row-forms, one usually finds a shift in “perspective” on the nature of the row; this shift, however, is not immediate and comes into focus gradually, and only then proceeds inevitably and recognizably to its end.

It is still difficult to reconcile the idea that twelve-tone music (and its subject) presumes to know what comes ahead with the idea that music (and subject) “become” in the way a human subject does, by appropriating memory and perception in a way that transforms *past* experience into something relevant for, but not predictive of, the future. This music prepares and rehearses for its end by constantly reiterating, in a limited number of possible manifestations, a series of interval-class successions. “The end” will, one presumes, be like one of these manifestations, and will be clear as “the end” less for its inevitability than for the cessation of further sound. As is the case with “Wie bin ich froh!,” however, other methods of organizing this utterance (phrase boundaries, for instance) may push against this organizational tendency. The idea of a pitch-centric “totality” governing twelve-tone music, then, is incommensurable with the idea of a musical subject that becomes in itself from the past to the present, for *any* totality is available only with retrospection. Gilles Deleuze, a Bergsonian adherent, writes as much about the cinematographical illusion, the aggregation of images by which we pretend to recreate motion and duration; this illusion attempts to reconstruct a whole and assumes that “all is given.” If all is indeed given, all must have been given previously.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983), trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Bergson used the example of counting clock strokes while inattentive to illustrate a similar point, noting that the mind does not know how many strokes have occurred and therefore conceives of the strokes-as-a-group as a unity; to fulfill the function of counting them, the mind reconstructs heterogeneous moments from the

Singing-towards-Death

Considering this music in connection with Martin Heidegger's discussion of death in *Being and Time* (1926) offers perhaps the most searing exploration of twelve-tone serialism's tensions between totality and consciousness, becoming and being-a-thing—and the most compelling bridge between the still-sensual aliveness of this music and Adorno's insistence on its connection with death. Heidegger acknowledges the impossibility of a subject's completely knowing or experiencing *itself* as a whole, ontologically: for Heidegger, this wholeness can only come about with the subject's end in death, at which point the subject can no longer conceive of a subject, much less its beginning, its end, or its totality.⁴⁶ The word "subject," however, is misleading in this connection: the word Heidegger uses is *Dasein*, usually translated as "being-there," to describe the individual entity that *is*, its "existence." *Dasein* is not quite a subject because Heidegger's concern is not with how it constructs and represents its self to itself.⁴⁷ Regarding the end of *Dasein's* existence, Heidegger writes that "as long as *Dasein* is, there is in every case something still outstanding, which *Dasein* can be and will be. But to that which is outstanding, the 'end' itself belongs. The 'end' of Being-in-the-world is death. This end, which belongs to the potentiality-for-Being—that is to say, to existence—limits and determines in every case whatever totality is possible for *Dasein*."⁴⁸ *Dasein*, that is, cannot conceive of or grasp the nature of itself in its entirety until the very essence of its being-there—its continuing existence—ceases.

homogeneous group. The totality must be present before accounting for its components or the manner in which it became. Tellingly, Bergson's simile for this example is the musical phrase. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 127–128. For Mansfield, "there is a contradiction between the attempt to grasp individual experience as a totality and the belief that its essence and truth is to be found in conscious processes." (*Subjectivity*, 20.)

⁴⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (1926), trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper, 1962), 276–278.

⁴⁷ For Heidegger, consciousness occurs at a later level, a result of the continuing, compelling "thereness" of *Dasein*. Carol J. White, *Time and Death: Heidegger's Analysis of Finitude* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 276–277.

At first, this seems a curious association to make with twelve-tone music generally and “Wie bin ich froh!” specifically. Assuming that rigorous compositional procedure remains, does not the initial laying-out of the row, which will run through and influence the entire rest of the song, and its interval-class patterns constitute a very predictable “end” for the piece? Yet successive rows traffic only in possibility. It is difficult to say specifically just how something will end before that end itself occurs, and one only *knows* it as an end after the end has transpired. The complexity of end-determination increases multifold when one complicates the notion of “ending” in the twelve-tone sense with the not-necessarily-overlapping formal (phrase, etc.) sense. Death, writes Heidegger, “is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there.” As mere capacity and not certainty, however, death “gives Dasein nothing to be ‘actualized,’” nothing to necessarily or concretely grasp.⁴⁹ The row, by virtue of the repetitive and transformative nature of its deployment in the serial composition, informs that an end of a certain kind—of a certain succession of interval classes or its reverse—will occur, but its specific details (P? R? I? RI?) remain clouded until “the end.”

That the totality of the music/Dasein/subject/organism cannot be grasped until after it is incapable of recursively generating more of itself is a music-analytical truism, albeit an uncomfortable one. But as Heidegger notes, this totality still *becomes* something even though it does not “live” in the sense of self-reflective, recursive generation. In his idiomatic construction, Heidegger writes that “when someone has died, his Being-no-longer-in-the-world ... is still a Being, but in the sense of a Being-just-present-at-hand-and-no-more of a corporeal Thing which we encounter.... The corpse which is present-at-hand is still a possible object for the student of pathological anatomy.”⁵⁰ The morbid transitivity between corpse and musical work is true and even necessary. Only in completion, inasmuch as completion is possible,

⁴⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294, 307.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 281–82.

does the musical work (or its constituent units) open fully to analysis.⁵¹

Yet this totality of the musical work seems very much at odds with the type of constructive totality with which Adorno is concerned—one of apparently material availability or possibility. And indeed, the “units” of (all, but especially twelve-tone) music undergo a parallel but lower-level reproduction of “ending,” whether those units are aggregated rows of pitch classes or phrases or sentences (and so on). One could, as Bergson does, extend the practice to smaller and smaller analytical levels—to the single tone and its absolute difference from silence⁵²—and find this ending/death. One also understands Adorno’s fascination with the twelve-tone chord: here beginning *and* ending conflate and paradoxically persist. The musical work’s totality, then, reproduces itself at some and every level as it “dies.” Yet until silence is absolute, it lives to continuously (re)generate itself from itself. This paradoxical living-within-dying, or dying-within-living, is fundamental yet maddeningly difficult to grasp practically.

We might argue that they are one and the same, that we begin to die as soon as we are born. Heidegger implicates death as the ultimate and ineluctable future possibility, writing that “death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein’s ownmost possibility—non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped. Death is, as Dasein’s end, in the Being of this entity *towards* its end.”⁵³

⁵¹ One can certainly analyze music as it is in the process of becoming, just as one might analyze or observe an organ of the human body while that body is still alive (i.e., becoming), yet one cannot *fully* account for that piece of music (nor for that bodily organ and its function) until the work (body) ceases to become, to live. The commonplace out-of-class complaint that analysis—which etymologically derives from “tearing apart”—“kills” the music is misplaced. Analysis does not kill: analysis scavenges at the corpse of a musical work that died by virtue of ever having become in the first place. Like the vulture, the analyst bides the cessation of recursive generation and—only after the epitaphic work, revived, falls silent again—grips it and tears away sustenance.

⁵² Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 258.

⁵³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 303. By “ownmost” Heidegger identifies Dasein’s death as unique only to Dasein; no other has a death like Dasein’s. The descriptor “non-relational” captures death’s station outside and apart from any other possibility; no matter what other future possibilities await Dasein, death is its only

Heidegger's understanding of death as "a way of *Being* in which Dasein *is towards* its death"⁵⁴ is a famous (and famously misconstrued) one. The activity of living incorporates the activity of dying as well; neither is voluntary in an existential sense. One *is*, to Heidegger, towards this "uttermost 'not-yet'" *in* a certain manner of comportment, and this manner of comportment has an effect on Dasein's quality and identity. Rather than gaining any particular insight of a complete, coherent understanding of one's whole life history, Dasein's Being-towards-death is an anticipation and an acknowledgement, and both actions free Dasein to preserve its identity and its relations to the world.⁵⁵

Here the intersection with Adorno's fetishized twelve-tone chord becomes clearer. When Adorno writes of the "fatal chord" as "stilling every dynamic," he writes of the impossibility of the "law of complementary harmony," a precept by which he alleges modern music maintains tonal impetus in the absence of tonal centers/weights.⁵⁶ Abstractly, at least, no further succession is necessary because of the completeness, in pitch class terms, of the twelve-tone chord's aggregate; any succession that *does* occur arises (is imposed) from some agent external to the music: the chord is being-a-thing. As Adorno does with the twelve-tone chord that deals in the materials of impetus, Heidegger describes death as "the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein."⁵⁷ Death qua death is certain and final, and after Dasein *is* dead, no one but an external other can affect its merely-corporeal-presence-at-hand in any way (e.g., the student of pathological anatomy). But when Dasein *is* alive (and thus *dying*), death's mere *possibility* signifies that Dasein may well continue its existence even after due consideration of its possible impossibility. Being-towards-death, after all, does not mean an end to everything upon Dasein's every consideration or

certain one, on which other possibilities have no bearing. This contributes to the term "not to be outstripped" as well, for there is not only no necessary relationship between death and other contingencies but also no limit to death's finality.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 291; original emphasis.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 293; Hubert L. Dreyfus, foreword to White, *Time and Death*, xviii, xx, xxvii.

⁵⁶ Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 65.

⁵⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294.

mental rehearsal of death. Heidegger argues quite the opposite: as the only possibility of Dasein that “gives Dasein nothing to be ‘actualized,’” it is impractical (Heidegger goes so far as to say *inauthentic*) to dwell upon death.⁵⁸ A pitch-class totality such as the twelve-tone chord in *Lulu* is but one lived, potential anticipation of the possibility of Dasein’s/the music’s ending/death. The fear that seems to accompany Adorno’s reading of the twelve-tone chord is both unnecessary and moot: the particular manifestation of the twelve-tone chord in *Lulu* is not death, is not a *re/presentation* of death, does not *stand in* for death—nothing can, in music, but for the absolute silence that attends its conclusion.

The overtones of dread with which Adorno addresses twelve-tone totality suggests and reveals a distinction in the comportment with which Dasein *is* when it is-towards-death. A dwelling-upon the actualization of death, to Heidegger, is an inauthentic bearing toward death itself, since its actualization is unknowable; fear of Dasein’s demise gets one caught up in details, so to speak.⁵⁹ Instead, writes Heidegger,

the state of mind which can hold open the utter and constant threat to itself arising from Dasein’s ownmost individualized Being, is anxiety. In this state of mind, Dasein finds itself face to face with the “nothing” of the possible impossibility of its existence Anticipation utterly individualizes Dasein, and allows it, in this individualization of itself, to become certain of the totality of its potentiality-for-Being Being-towards-death is essentially anxiety.⁶⁰

Heidegger’s “anxiety” is not a clinical diagnosis with a collection of symptoms, but rather a state of acknowledgement and vigilance; it contrasts the more banal, “everyday” fear of (the actualization of) one’s demise.⁶¹ A certain generalized anxiety in Webern’s song is just such an acknowledging address of death. While the piano’s gradual abbreviation of the rhythmic motive in both the first and second phrases is a species of death-rehearsal—“is this kind of

⁵⁸ Ibid., 305, 307.

⁵⁹ White, *Time and Death*, 87.

⁶⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 310.

⁶¹ Ibid., 296–298. “Everydayness” in Heidegger is the realm of the “they,” a collective social force that draws Dasein away from the solitude in which it constructs a truly free identity (311).

truncation a possibility-for-death?”—it is also astutely constructed, so that the sixteenth-note triplets (for instance) always occur with sets of pitch classes in the row that have the same interval-class content. Rhythmically, the utterance is an anticipation of death—the recursive restatement of a motive and an elemental waning of the “stuff” that comprises it. As soon as the process of disintegration ends (in mm. 4, for instance), pieces of the rhythmic motive suddenly regenerate and begin another disintegration process. Anxiety in the text is similarly understated; doubts about the beneficence of the world turning green “yet again” surface in carefully couched language about an excess of a presumably good thing (the over-blooming of flowers). “Noch einmal” is crucial: it is not the first time that everything has become green (again) or that the I has been placed into becoming; this I has previously considered similar or identical possibilities. The final poetic line now seems to have been uttered with tongue firmly in cheek: “And [I] am on earth”—am grounded, am mortal.

The divorce of phrase and subphrase from row aggregation in the song seems to *discourage* Adorno’s qualms about the alliance of death and the chromatic aggregate: utterance does not end when the aggregate does. Instead, the row exemplifies one *kind* (possibility) of end(ing) towards which the song *is*, and anxiety of that end plays out, by necessity, in the row’s various interactions with the rest of the musical structure, from its transformations of itself, to the simultaneous enactment-towards-death of the rhythmic motive, to its uncomfortable relationship with phrase endings. The row is no *cause* for alliance with death, that is: its interactions within the song indicate that it is instead a symptom of that mode of Being that considers and addresses the possibility of its own cessation.

As such, Being-towards-death’s consideration of the possibility of ending also includes possibilities between the present and the end—what Heidegger calls Dasein’s “potentiality-for-Being.”⁶² Because death is something that is “still outstanding,” and because Dasein in Being-towards-death creates a potentiality-for-Being rich with possibility, Being-towards-death is a way of being “ahead-of-

⁶² Ibid., 309.

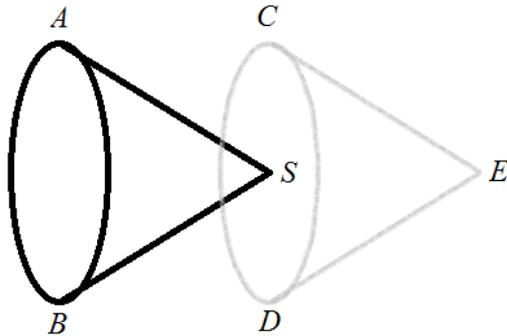
oneself.”⁶³ Jacques Derrida writes that “with death, Dasein is indeed *in front of* itself, *before* itself, both as before a mirror and as before the future: it waits itself, it precedes itself, it has a rendezvous with itself.”⁶⁴ One might thus, as in Fig. 2, reinterpret and add to Bergson’s conical representation of memory, funneling from a broad base in the past to a point that meets the ever-moving plane of the present; the addition of another cone (with gray edges to represent its tenuousness, its possibility) with a circular base (*CD*) parallel to (and just past) the plane of the present (*S*), tapering to another point in the future (*E*), might represent Being-towards-death. It tapers to a single point, as the past-to-present cone does, because every Being has but one end. The infinitesimal distance between the present—*S*, the apex of the past-to-present cone—and Being-towards-death’s circular cone base (*CD*) is a zone of expansion: possibility erupts from the present and gradually narrows towards death. The base of the gray Being-towards-death cone, like the apex of Bergson’s past-to-present cone, moves always. The parallelism between the two cones also captures the parallelism between living and dying. “Dasein,” writes Carol White, “does not ‘run ahead’ of death; it ‘runs ahead’ to death.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid., 279; White, *Time and Death*, 66.

⁶⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying—Awaiting (One Another at) the “Limits of Truth,”* trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 66.

⁶⁵ White, *Time and Death*, 90.

Figure 2. Graphical representation of being-towards-death, using Bergson's SAB cone as basis



The same might be said of the twelve-tone row. Even when a row first appears in a work, it rehearses ending: by the very nature of the technique, the possibilities of remaining pitch classes winnow as the row progresses in time. Subsequent row-forms revisit and rehearse this process: each of them acknowledge an ending via chromatic aggregation and interval-class patterns, but the specific details of getting-to-the-end are variable.⁶⁶

Death is not an *experience*, however, for “when Dasein reaches its wholeness in death, it simultaneously loses the Being of its

⁶⁶ Adorno ties the “abdication” of the musical subject in this music to Webern’s “fetishism” of the row, and specifically to the composer’s often redundant row construction (not a property of the “Wie bin ich froh!” row), which results in fewer than 48 distinct possible row-form. The limitation of possible transformation of a row means that the potential material-becoming of an abstractly thing-become row becomes tighter, more restricted in possibility; Adorno likens this to a certain commerce with an other (or lack thereof) when he writes that “the subject has become so lonely [in twelve-tone music] that it can no longer seriously hope of finding another who would understand it” (*Philosophy of New Music*, 87). As “Wie bin ich froh!” positively demonstrates, commerce with an other is a necessity for recursive becoming and thus healthy selfhood. The non-relation of Dasein’s death would thus seem to assume a prior relation to some other in order to authentically “be there.”

‘there.’”⁶⁷ Any alleged bringing-about of the possibility or possibilities of death, *as* experience, by this music is inauthentic, and thus, attempts to say that twelve-tone music enacts “like death”—or worse, *is* death—are inaccurate. The very idea that one might experience one’s own death arises from the experience of the death of *others*; as Heidegger writes, observing the death of another makes the idea of cessation “objectively accessible.”⁶⁸ Adorno, that is, imagines the procession of twelve-tone music to *be like* or *represent* death because he witnesses the death of (historical) tonality in the cessation of tonal music’s motility, in the mitigation of its impulses, by the omnipresence and equity of all pitch classes in the chromatic aggregate rather than an artificially enforced weight toward one or another pitch class. For the subject in the music, twelve-tone composition is another way of becoming: as with much music, the subject co-opts both its near and distant pasts to generate further content and to comment on itself—much as the human subject does in constructing its autobiographical consciousness. These constant but rigorously limited transformations (at least in the realm of pitch class) can have a numbing effect by their very ubiquity. The musical subject, by necessity, performs similar work as the analyst does: it takes its past as object—even though it generated that past—and either transforms it into something varied and newly appropriate for the present context or creates a novel utterance in contrast. The analyst has the benefit of hindsight, of taking the song as totality, of observing it as whole because it has “died” or ended, while the musical subject creates based on the possibilities of its dying/ending-in-progress, on its status as potentiality-for-Being.

“Wie bin ich froh!” never hopes to represent the death-experience of another, focusing solely on the I, but in a strangely detached way. This I rarely takes action: only in the first and last lines of the poem does the I serve as the grammatical subject (rather than object, as in the rest of the lines). Even then, the action the I undertakes is less action than attribution—I *am* happy, I *am*

⁶⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 281. “What is it to pass the term of one’s life?” adds Derrida. “Is it possible? Who has ever done it and who can testify to it?” (*Aporias*, 8).

⁶⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 281.

on Earth. Otherwise, things happen *to* the I—everything becomes green *to* it, the world overblossoms with flowers *to* it, it *is placed* into becoming. This I describes itself as an object, then—what change occurs occurs outside of it. In a sense, the music treats its constituent self in a way parallel to the text’s treatment of its (same) constituent self—as an object. As Adorno notes, the impulse to continue beyond chromatic aggregation, in the absence of any other artificial weighting of pitch class, falls to forces outside the music itself. The succession of row-forms can seem arbitrary in this way, as if an anatomical pathologist were manipulating the “stuff” of a body that had lost its motility.⁶⁹ Yet these attempts at establishing the music as object—and thus dead—fail because, perhaps in spite of itself, “Wie bin ich froh!” generates itself *beyond* the concept of “ending” with pitch-class succession and aggregation in the twelve-tone row. It generates itself not through a surfeit of ubiquitous, rigorous transformations of pitch and interval-class successions—this is possible from an automaton—but rather through its mitigation of and resistance to these transformations. The subject’s modification of the piano’s rhythmic motive, for instance, shows an awareness of and development of the immediate past that points to active subjective becoming rather than passive submission. It also provides a counterpoint to the idea of “ending” levied by row-forms in the work, instead suggesting ending as a gradual abbreviation or nullification rather than a path toward a certain point (pitch class). Another such counterpoint is the music’s resistance in aligning phrase ending with row-form ending: were the two frequently aligned, one might more openly question the presence of any impulsive subjective presence behind the successions of row-form. The collision of phrase ending, row-form endings and continuances, tempo change, and rhythmic motivic transformation in mm. 10 creates a telling moment:

⁶⁹ Bergson distinguishes between homogeneous duration, in which states succeed one another by apparently “melting into one another and forming an organic whole,” and its constitutive heterogeneous durations, which appear as well-defined states (*Time and Free Will*, 128). Such heterogeneity, as qualitatively separate, is *inorganic* in the way a single row-form is; the combination of row-forms requires subjective action to link them.

anxiety, the marker of a subject anticipating death and rehearsing it as an inevitability amidst its future possibilities, peaks at this moment and results in the cataclysmic mm. 11—the subject’s acknowledgement both of physical presence on earth and the eventual turning-into-earth that will befall it.

As a result of the tension enforced between transformational becoming and being-a-thing in the song—what might in Heidegger be called simply “Becoming versus Being”—a hybrid view of subjective time takes hold.⁷⁰ On the one hand, the treatment of something as an object places it outside of the time in which it *became* originally; treating these “objects” as such for the duration of a work (as happens to the poetic I and the music’s pitch and interval-class successions in “Wie bin ich froh!”) implies an inability for those objects to have presented themselves or to have influenced the way in which they are presented—in short, this treatment classifies them as lifeless. But on the other hand, the temporally linear and functionally aware manipulation of those objects suggests a subject in the process of becoming in the present tense, appropriating its own past in a constant revision of what it is to *be* itself. This concept of the autobiographically constructed self pervades and seemingly governs the particularities of twelve-tone row-forms in “Wie bin ich froh!” Jonathan Kramer suggests that becoming aligns with linear time—the processive determination of some characteristic according to an earlier implication or event—and being with nonlinear time, or the determination of a characteristic from governing principles and/or tendencies.⁷¹ Certainly nonlinear constructive principles pervade “Wie bin ich froh!,” but so too do linear, determining processive developments; this hybridization of time within the song is perhaps not

⁷⁰ In a discussion of post-Webern integral serialism, Adorno too briefly writes that “in place of subjective intention, Being itself is supposed to be heard” in the music. “The Aging of the New Music” (1955), trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 192. Adorno aligns “Being” with “the arrangement of material” rather than with the “coherence” he associates with non-serial music.

⁷¹ Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Schirmer, 1988), 16, 20. Kramer is careful to note that nonlinearity is not equivalent to discontinuity.

uncommon in twelve-tone music, and may be a reason for Kramer's caution regarding the temporal structure of serial works.⁷²

Song analysis is a series of reciprocal identifications, an interweaving of "just-as" similes between analyst and song, and always there remains the impossibility of grasping the other's experience. The hybridization of time in "Wie bin ich froh!" points out both the advantages and drawbacks of the analyst: by the very nature of the song's totality being present and available to the analyst, the analyst may reconstruct its becoming—but may never relive it, since such reconstruction is always of the past. From the time a song erupts, is born, breaks through, begins to create a self of some kind—it simultaneously creates the possibilities of its own ending. This is always true, but "Wie bin ich froh!" does more: it enacts this course, knows it does, tells us it does. Its subject projects itself repeatedly on the screen of the song and both invites and engages in that orientation-toward-ending—that tearing apart, that unraveling—of analysis. Song's lesson is paradoxically one of vitality and one of a comportment toward the cessation of that vitality, and in that sense song parallels our own humanity. Song dies, always, as we do; but, as we are, it never *is* dead.

⁷² Ibid., 183.

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