

# The Schoenberg Phenomenon: Twelve-tone Music and its Absolute Alienation

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## Abstract

Through Adorno's analysis, Schoenberg was an important figure representing aspects of musical modernism but at the same time, Adorno dramatically opposed it in many aspects of his music. Although he has a highly negative view of the "Schoenberg phenomenon", he discovers there is an important change in Schoenberg's works in the manner in which the composer relates to his material. This paper will attempt to deal with various aspects of Adorno's criticism of the "Schoenberg phenomenon" based on his article "Schoenberg and Progress".<sup>2</sup> It will address two issues: on the one hand, the twelve-tone technique and, its organisation and on the other, the attitude towards society of this new language of music. These issues concern the problem of "absolute alienation".

**Key Words:** Adorno, Schoenberg, Twelve-Tone Music, Atonality, Alienation.

During the 1920s, Adorno dealt with musicians and writers in his cultural criticism. His writings began to demonstrate original points of view, according to which the role of society became an important factor in causing an artist to generate creative material. Generally, there is a strong polarisation in Adorno's criticism. He demonstrates a particular kind of utopian expectation, on the other hand his criticism represents a deeply pessimistic approach. This dualism might be related to historical events in Europe. Between 1918 and 1922, he was influenced by utopian expressionistic culture but after 1924, he also was influenced by the restoration period, when there was a collapse in optimistic views in Germany. All economical, political and also cultural improvements were restrained. Adorno and Schoenberg shared the same experiences during this period.

Although biographical detail is not a primary concern of this study, some concentration on the acquaintanceship between Adorno and Schoenberg can be of benefit. Schoenberg and Adorno had known each other during the 1920s, as Adorno had been one of Berg's composition pupils since 1925. During this time, regarding his position in historical tradition, Schoenberg represented an opposite attitude towards aristocratic and bourgeois tradition. This attitude is important for Adorno's criticism because he also is interested in the negative aspects of late-bourgeois society. In 1923 Schoenberg's method of twelve-tone composition matured in *The Five Pieces For Piano*, op.23 and *Serenade*, op.24. Adorno occasionally had discussions with Schoenberg about twelve-tone music. Adorno and Schoenberg were working in Vienna, this helped Adorno

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<sup>2</sup> In 1941, Adorno wrote an essay on "Schoenberg and Progress" that explained the realisation of the twelve-tone series into a new compositional system. In the following years he wrote a piece on the other great twentieth-century composers and Stravinsky. Together with "Schoenberg and Progress" essay, the two pieces were published in 1948 as *Philosophy of Modern Music*.



to confirm his views of the new music. Adorno saw Schoenberg as an innovator, reformer and inventor of a new system. Schoenberg's particular kind of "progressive character" was evaluated in the critical discourses of Adorno. In the 1930s, Adorno identified Schoenberg with all that was progressive in modern music.<sup>3</sup> He believed that a progressive artist has a heroic character and felt that Schoenberg seemed to fit this image. Progress involves alteration and here the concepts of artistic innovation and originality are involved. This artist rejected various aspects of "tradition" and, in addition, he rejected certain aspects of the "society" that had fostered and supported this tradition.

In the following years, Adorno began to examine the rationalisation and the process of monopolisation in German industry.<sup>4</sup> He criticised the historical changes of the period of rationalisation and thus dealt with the question of rationalisation of music. The twelve-tone technique is not only a compositional method, but also a system of rationalisation. Although Adorno mentions that the twelve-tone technique is an "inevitable outcome" of the historical domination from within the material, and a manifestation of the tendency towards extreme rationalisation of all aspects of social life, he does not seem to regard it as the only form of rationalisation possible for atonality:

Twelve-tone technique is truly the fate of music. It enchains music by liberating it. The subject dominates music through the rationality of the system, only in order to succumb to the rational system itself.<sup>5</sup>

Adorno felt essentially unsympathetic towards serialism because he saw it as the tyranny of method over material, a failure within artistic technique even more ominous than the cultural industry's invasion of technique by technology. The rationalisation of music was described by him in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

The total rationality of music is its total organisation. By means of organisation, liberated music seeks to reconstitute the last totality, the last power and responsibility binding force of Beethoven. Music succeeds in so doing only at the price of its freedom, and thereby it fails. Beethoven reproduced the meaning of tonality out of objective freedom. The new ordering of twelve-tone technique virtually extinguishes the subject.<sup>6</sup>

His view was that, as an objective music, twelve-tone music represented parallel approaches within the social and economical process of rationalisation. From the 1940s on, his positive viewpoint about Schoenberg completely changed. Stuckenschmidt explains the acquaintanceship between Adorno and Schoenberg in this period:

...both Adorno and Schoenberg were in exile in California. Even in their exile, there were no friendly relations, and indeed at meetings in houses of common friends there were battles of words between them... Schoenberg was angered by the book [Philosophy of Modern Music] and his anger overlooked the fact that it was more a defence than a criticism of his work.<sup>7</sup>

Adorno observed that there was a progressive decline in the importance of dialectical principles in music. At the same time, there was a disappearance of the concept of work as object which resulted in the autonomy of the work. This autonomy, in effect the total control of sound material, was defended by Schoenberg. The subject was controlled by this system because the system has its own exterior principles. The subjectivity of music no longer tried to express the object.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Franklin, *The Idea of Music - Schoenberg and Others*, Macmillan, London, 1985, p.61.

<sup>4</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Social Situation of Music" trans. W.Blomster, Telos35 (Spring, 1978, pp.128-164) was written during the 1930s. In addition Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (trans. John Cumming, Verso, London, 1979) was focused upon the same issue.

<sup>5</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. A.G. Mitchell and B. Blomster, Seabury Press, New York: 1973, pp. 67-68.

<sup>6</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, Verso, London, 1979, p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt. *Schoenberg: His life, World and Works*, trans. Humfrey Searle, John Calder, London, 1977, p. 495 and p. 508.



Subject and object cannot reconcile in their perfect resolution (synthesis). Here it can be seen that there is a “protest” that declined into a domination of subjectivity. During this process, the subjective was alienated by objective forces. Thus, the twelve-tone system began its insistence on the duality of form and content. Adorno attempts to systematise the crisis of the objective work. He states that:

Under the coercion of its own objective consequences music has critically invalidated the idea of the polished work and disrupted the collective continuity of its effect. To be sure no crisis has been able to put a stop to public musical life -neither the economic crisis nor the cultural crisis...<sup>8</sup>

It can be seen that Adorno views the music of Schoenberg as a starting point for the crisis of objectivity in music. In the 1950's, Adorno's point of view of the negative critical elements on Schoenberg's music was increased, especially after the twelve-tone technique became a more rigid imperative of composition to his followers. He stated in 1952:

It is not the method itself that is false - no one can compose any longer who has not sensed with his own ears the gravitational pull towards the twelve-tone technique - but rather its hypostatisation, the rejection of all that is otherwise of anything not already analytically assimilated.<sup>9</sup>

Adorno states Schoenberg's ideas on the material of music and attributes to them a specific interpretation of the social position of music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before examining the issues surrounding Schoenberg's attitude towards the alienation of society, it is important to understand Adorno's views on the organisation of the twelve-tone technique.

The language of Schoenberg's music abandons harmony, and moves towards polyphony. Tonality modifies its character and reaches “atonality”. Here the traditional dialectic of harmony is abandoned, and oppositions within the contrapuntal structure are handled through the process of negative dialectics. Adorno states his ideas about counterpoint in his book *Quasi una fantasia*:

The radically contrapuntal Schoenberg of the twelve-tone period considered that harmony was simply not a relevant issue. It should just emerge from the serial structures and counterpoint as a by-product, without constituting an essential dimension in its own right.<sup>10</sup>

According to Adorno, Schoenberg follows this technical path in certain ways:

A - With the regression of tonality, counterpoint is emancipated and linearity is adopted; in other words, polyphony is accepted. Schoenberg liberated music from the hierarchical structure of traditional harmony and allowed dissonance, music with no concluding cadence. According to Adorno:

Polyphonic music, the least presentational of aesthetic modes, is best suited to the expression of this image - in addition, the complexities of its mediations (composer-performer-instrument-technical reproduction) make music a particularly rich field for the play of his dialectical imagination.<sup>11</sup>

B - Through the technique of repetition, ornamentation and symmetrization of music, such as symmetrical relations of rows should be criticised, which Schoenberg achieves in his twelve-tone compositions. According to Adorno:

[Twelve-tone technique's] dialectic is one of the architectonic features of music as such. As a developmental structure, music is an absolute negation of repetition... on the other hand, it is only able to develop by virtue of repetition. Thematic work, the principle which

<sup>8</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. A. G. Mitchell and B. Blomster, Seabury Press, New York, 1973, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms: Cultural Criticism and Society*, trans. Samuel Shiery Weber, Neville Spearman, London, 1977, p.166.

<sup>10</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi una fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. R. Livingstone, Verso, London, 1992, p.188.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Jay, *Adorno*, Fontana Paperbacks, London, 1984, p.182



concretises the abstract passage of time in terms of musical substance, is never more than the dissimilarity of the similar...<sup>12</sup>

C - Schoenberg starts to lean towards the harmony and thus it can be seen that he applies his intentions as a modernist composer to the material. Tonal material is reduced through its structural organisation via the rows. This renunciation of material is not determined from within itself but is imposed from outside. Adorno states that:

It reduces the tonal material, before it is structured via the rows, to an amorphous substratum, totally undetermined within itself. Thereupon the commanding compositional subject imposes its system of rules and regulations.<sup>13</sup>

According to Adorno, the materials of music become subjective in the twelve-tone technique. In this technique, there is an equalisation but it is not objective equalisation. The subject forms its own rational system but here subject appears as an object. Thus twelve-tone music lies beyond subjectivity. This subjective quality directly approaches the ideal of mastery as domination. Here the material is subjugated by the self-contained system of rules of the subject. Thus, the liberation of the subject from its material occurs.

D - Finally, Schoenberg sees the social dialectic with the mediation of contradictions or opposites as part of the material of music:

Music becomes the result of processes to which the materials of music have been subjected and the perception of which in themselves is blocked by the music. Thus music becomes static.<sup>14</sup>

Adorno insists that this music suffers from a structural ambiguity. The twelve-tone technique causes the equalisation of the musical content which results in a growth in developmental technique. Thus the general organisational principle is formed by variations on each part of. According to Adorno, the objectivity of music is a form of developmental technique which represents avoidance of content. He states that, "Schoenberg carefully preserves a distance between himself and the material"<sup>15</sup>. For Adorno, Schoenberg understood the growing insufficiency of the concept of the work and at the same time he does not reject it from his music. Schoenberg shares this problem with Beethoven's later works according to Adorno. For him, Schoenberg's music represents the process of "the severing of subjective freedom from objective reality".<sup>16</sup>

Adorno viewed that, like Beethoven's later works, the twelve-tone technique represented the process of negative dialectics with its powerful or weak characteristics, or its own truthful or untruthful qualities. On the one hand, Adorno adopts atonality and the twelve-tone technique as the characteristics of new music; on the other hand, he seems less interested in these characteristics than questioning the concept of truth. Indeed, Schoenberg's concept of truth cannot be revealed solely in the discussion of the categories of atonality or twelve-tone technique, but they can be found in the crystallisation of these categories. Thus, with the twelve-tone technique, the end of artificial harmony and the freedom of dissonance were formed into a systematic method, and such dominating techniques provided its formal transmission.

In twelve-tone music, the relationship between subject and object appears problematic in nature. Their relationship becomes stricter in this music. As coherence in structure determines the truth of this music, its concerns are turned inwards. On the one hand, the structural approach of Schoenberg's music reflects relatively extreme kinds of formalism. This quality gives his music a

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 284 n7.

<sup>13</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. A. G. Mitchell and B. Blomster, Seabury Press, New York, 1973, Ibid. p. 117.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 119.

<sup>16</sup> Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music*, University of Minnesota Press, Oxford, 1991, p. 17.



semblance of verifiable “objective validity”. This formalism occurs through strict mathematical order and its formal principles are derived logically from expressionistic materials. These principles make the music a strong analogy to the characteristics of the human individual which become absolute. On the other hand, Adorno claims that Schoenberg also diminishes the role of the individual. During this process, Schoenberg expresses a musical definition of the individual in the notes of the twelve-tone row. According to Adorno, Schoenberg continues to express himself in traditional elements. Thus, he tries to defend the elements of thematic, linear and historical continuity as resembling the temporal modes of existence of an individual. On a large scale, the truth lies in the density of the structure of twelve-tone music. The subjective role is demonstrated and the objective role is alienated. These problematic aspect can be seen in Adorno’s discussion:

In an historical hour, when the reconciliation of subject and object has been perverted to a satanic parody - to the liquidation of the subjective in objective presentation- the only philosophy which still serves this reconciliation is one which despises this illusion of reconciliation and - against universal self-alienation - establishes the validity of the hopeless alienated, for which a “subject itself” scarcely any longer speaks.<sup>17</sup>

The total alienation of the subject reveals a problem in its aesthetic quality and in its expressionistic phase. On a large scale Schoenberg’s music shows a disintegration into fragments of the formal material. This external imposition remains outside the musical material. In this manner the total organisation of sound led to the fragmentation of thematic and formal material. Within these fragments, the subject proves its sovereignty over the material. Adorno states that:

Musical language dissociates itself into fragments. In these fragments, however, the subject is able to appear directly -“in its significance,” as Goethe might have said- while the parentheses of the material totality hold it in their spell.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, music has a critical dimension which takes the subject-object opposition as a starting point. In these oppositions of form and content or the oppositions of idea and structure the contradictions in society are reflected. Although there is an increase of expressive character, the unity of the work starts to decrease because of its atonality. Atonality rows in motion a fragmentation in which the subject and object, part and whole, becomes irreconcilable. The importance of expressive character results in the creation of structural organisation. This organisation through the twelve-tone technique provides the consolidation of subjective dynamics, but it does not try to achieve reconciliation. Thus, form and content can be seen as a dualism. In this case, there is an object represented by the series, which has lost its power and is dictated by a subjective force, representing its system of rules. Thus, the subject appears to be superior. The traditional dialectic process of music is changed and does not reflect the perfect reconciliation of subject and object. Adorno states that:

[as] an artist he [Schoenberg] wins back for mankind freedom from art, a dialectical composer, he brings dialectics to a halt.<sup>19</sup>

For Adorno, the material no longer expresses anything and a peculiar opposition appears between expression and twelve-tone mechanics. Adorno felt that Schoenberg’s music transforms the elements of expression so that the possibility of expression itself can be called into question.

Twelve-tone series express the individuality of the composer and it is neutralised. Expressive content changes its character so that it becomes fragmented and it cannot be described as subjective expression. Thus the expression of the rejected subject is crushed by the objective order. In addition, the predetermined manipulation of the rows excludes almost all possibility of subjective qualities.

<sup>17</sup> T.W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. A. G. Mitchell and B. Blomster, Seabury Press, New York, 1973, pp. 27-28.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 118.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 124.



Although there is an isolation of the parts, it can be seen that the unity of part and whole is achieved in twelve-tone music. Indeed, the whole does not develop organically out of the parts. Instead, its structure is imposed from outside and for this reason it is fragmented.

Adorno's Marxist-inspired dissatisfaction with the repressive society of modern mass-production causes him to view the sociological issues surrounding his ideal progressive composer Schoenberg in a negative manner. Here, the question of alienation begins to arise in Adorno's criticism of Schoenberg's twelve-tone music. Franklin states that:

One of the most seriously damning of Adorno's final points is that to care for truth and freedom must be to realise that there is no viable alternative in our society, on the level of high art, to the grim predicament of Schoenberg's final phase.<sup>20</sup>

Adorno argued that music contained social contradictions within its language and this characteristic appeared in Schoenberg's music, although its relation to society was problematic. According to Adorno, a composer should be aware of his social isolation is expressed through the composition. The work then seeks to overcome isolation through its communication to an audience. At this point, Schoenberg seems to Adorno which unaware of the social position of his music. However, Schoenberg's music protects itself somewhat from the external dominance of social forces. In this process, he withdraws into the logic of music itself. On the other hand, according to Adorno, music must go beyond the prevailing consciousness of the masses, as music theory does. In the case of Schoenberg, music was converted into the logic of music itself. During this process, Schoenberg refuses all that hampers or in any way colours his personal freedom and individualism. Adorno himself demonstrated his purpose indirectly when he wrote of Schoenberg's music:

The more it gives its listeners, the less it offers them. It requires the listener spontaneously to compose its inner movement and demands of him not mere contemplation but praxis.<sup>21</sup>

It can be seen that Schoenberg modifies traditional listening with his music. Thus the social character of his music changes. According to Adorno, this music abandons the customary crutches of traditionally predictable music such as tonal music. With Schoenberg:

...ordering categories, which reduce the difficulties of active listening at the cost of the pure elaboration of the work, are eliminated. This absence of all mediations introduced into the work from outside makes the musical progression seem fragmented and abrupt to the unnaive listener.<sup>22</sup>

In Adorno's discussion, Schoenberg's twelve-tone music reduces the possibility of communication with the listener and thus it never fulfils a social function. On the one hand, this music surpasses its contemporaries through its interior quality and dialectical clarification. On the other hand, it creates a rational total organisation which is never reconciled with society. Schoenberg does this in a less than idealistic manner. He employs this technique in the material of music by examining its structure.

Thus, music begins to correspond to a momentous social change. The work of art is enabled to withdraw itself from the traditional dialectic process as a reaction to dialectical domination. The dialectic process was stopped because it occurs in society itself. Every interruption, every forgetfulness, every innovation in the creative process of twelve-note music demonstrates a reaction to society.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Franklin, *The Idea of Music - Schoenberg and Others*, Macmillan, London, 1985, p.70.

<sup>21</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms: Cultural Criticism and Society*, trans. Samuel Shiery Weber, Neville Spearman, London, 1977, pp.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 153



Therefore, Schoenberg's music includes a negative view relation to society. In Adorno's sociological criticism, this aspect of twelve-tone music shows Schoenberg's failure to isolate music from social life. For all the failings of Schoenberg's twelve note compositions, they have successfully resisted every gratification impulse and untruth of mass society. Adorno sees the paradoxical nature of the twelve-tone formula as characterising Schoenberg's ambivalent attitude towards authority. This seeks to defend the work "as though behind a hidden authority". However, this, in turn "ultimately makes itself into the authority." During this process, "it combines aesthetic avant-gardism with a conservative mentality".<sup>23</sup> This authority might be related to the historical position in the 1920s. During this time, aristocratic and the bourgeois tradition continued but they were partly destroyed. Schoenberg did not adopt an escape from traditional, cultural and social forms. Instead of this, he felt that it is necessary to show the destruction of these forms and tried to prove this position in his works.

Adorno insists that a work's complexity of meaning should be understood as a mediator. In addition to this, the work is mediated within itself. However, this mediation cannot be understood simply, because it is the link between the work and the performer or audience. For Adorno, it is the task of the composer to respond to the demands of the musical material, and for this reason Schoenberg was responsible for the renunciation of the characteristics of his music's material. During this process, the task of the listener is to understand the demands of the work. On the other hand Adorno states that:

The correctness of twelve-tone music cannot be directly "heard" - this is the simplest name for that movement of meaninglessness in it. Only the force of the system rules; only this is perceptible.<sup>24</sup>

Here Schoenberg's music displays a paradoxical quality. The twelve-tone technique needs to be analysed for this to be understood. However, this analysis reflects complexity, because of the structure of the twelve-tone technique. It requires a particular mode of listening that reinforces its isolation from society in defending its own autonomy.

This type of listening process is expected to result in an understanding of the unfolding realisation, with all the inner relationships of a musical concept. Ultimately, the conditions surrounding such understanding of the twelve-tone technique result in its social irrelevance, because the public at large cannot perceive the structure of twelve-tone music in the way a composer understands and controls it. Consequently, ideas have been formed of twelve-tone music as something to be avoided. Subotnik generalised the meaning of this type of listening, terming it "structural listening". Subotnik does not attempt to confirm Adorno's account entirely, but according to her, structural listening alienates society from music in two ways. First, it requires a conscious expenditure of time devoted exclusively to itself, both for its exercise and for its mastery. Secondly, the demand for structural listening cuts off the general public from its accustomed sensuous and stylistic modes of listening.<sup>25</sup> The public reaction to Schoenberg's twelve-tone music was mainly hostile. In particular, Dahlhaus captures this paradox in his discussion about Schoenberg's early chamber music. According to him:

The isolation into which Schoenberg falls is to be understood primarily as the distancing of the chamber music composer from the chamber music listeners, from the musically cultivated audience.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 151

<sup>24</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. A. G. Mitchell and B. Blomster, Seabury Press, New York, 1973, p. 118

<sup>25</sup> Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music*, University of Minnesota Press, Oxford, 1991, p. 281.

<sup>26</sup> C. Dahlhaus, "Brahms und die Idee der Kammermusik" p. 49 quoted from J. Brand and C. Hailey, *Constructive Dissonance - Arnold Schoenberg and Transformations of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Culture*, University of California Press, London, 1997, p. 89.



On the other hand it can be understood that Schoenberg does not care so much about the listeners:

...the fact that listeners are there appears to be necessary, because an empty concert hall doesn't sound good. In other words: I somehow put up with them, as material, but I could get by without them.<sup>27</sup>

Adorno's opinions of Schoenberg's music are difficult to understand logically. It can be perceived that, from his writings, he believes that music was isolated from social life and thus there was no way to interact with it. From a dialectical perspective especially, Adorno's negative perspective on twelve-tone music can be seen as critical. This method of composing reflects its critical relation to its material, but in addition its relation to society by creating the appearance of synthesis between the work as an aesthetic subject and society.

Thus, Schoenberg's music reflects the reality of musical life. Like surrealist art, music cannot appear in a form that everyone can understand. From this point of view, works of art are never created for the listener. It can be seen that a work's creation is based on the impulse of the repetition of the natural creative state. The production of art can be thought of as an example of creation; in this way, the work should be seen according to its own direction. Adorno strikes at the very heart of the matter of alienation when he writes: "Schoenberg honours the listener by making no concessions to him". With these words, Adorno states the need that music, and art in all forms, must grow up, which then make the same requirement of us as listeners. This is the new experimental world that Schoenberg discovered. From this point of view, Adorno's judgement of alienation does not seem appropriate. According to Subotnik:

Schoenberg's systematic disallowance of traditionally defined consonances and tone-centres has often suggested that such music wants to shock the public into paying attention to it. Whether by alienation of its audience, twelve-tone music tries to challenge listeners in ways that will draw them back, however reluctantly, for further hearings, and perhaps even for a change of consciousness.<sup>28</sup>

The exploration of comprehensibility in the arts may have another dimension concerning communication. A work of art creates its own language, based on the media it uses. In the same way, normal literal language which reflects rather different constructions can be seen as analogous, using language as a kind of communication. On the other hand, it is not possible to say that the arts appear uncommunicating and meaningless.

In Adorno's account, the most radical innovation of 20<sup>th</sup> century music is atonality and the twelve-tone technique. Only this new music allows its own knowledge of truth. In Adorno's discussion, the twelve-tone technique is considered not for its function as a method but in its significance in an historical context. Adorno sees the twelve-tone technique as the result of an unchangeable historical process. He points out that musical material itself moves continually towards a new structure. For this reason Schoenberg ceased with an old-fashioned technique which follows a structure predetermined by the material itself. However, for Adorno, the strictness of Schoenberg's method seems to constrain other composers.

It can be seen that Adorno supplies us with a precious tool for analysing and putting into perspective these issues which have been called the "Schoenberg phenomenon". Adorno's approach towards the "Schoenberg phenomenon" is that of a critical social philosophy. If, as Adorno claimed, Schoenberg's anti-systematic atonality is organised through the twelve-tone system, it is important to consider the same can be said of Adorno's atonal philosophy. According to Susan Buck Morss:

<sup>27</sup> Susan Buck-Morss. *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, The Havester Press, Sussex, 1977, pp. 34-35

<sup>28</sup> Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music*, University of Minnesota Press, Oxford, 1991, p. 272.





The real issue is whether Adorno's attempt of a revolution within philosophy, modelled self-consciously after Schoenberg, in fact succumbed to the same fate, whether his principle of antisystem itself become a system... When the method of negative dialectics became total, philosophy threatened to come to a standstill as well, and the New Left of the 1960s not unjustly criticised Adorno for taking Critical Theory into a dead end.<sup>29</sup>

Adorno's interpretational method covers a well-arranged analysis of technical, sociological and philosophical-historical aspects. This interdisciplinary approach of Adorno's critical method provides us with a broader perspective during the process of analysis.

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<sup>29</sup> S. Buck-Morss. *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, The Havester Press, Sussex, 1977, pp. 189-190.

