

**Webern's *Variations for Piano*, Op. 27:
Musical Structure and the
Performance Score**

by

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Although for Webern, as distinct from Schoenberg, the dodecaphonic scheme made a vital contribution to the beauty of a work, he never once referred to that aspect during our meetings which continued for several weeks. Even when I asked, he refused to talk about it--what mattered, he said, was for me to learn how the piece ought to be played, not how it is made.¹

Stadlen's edition comes as the capstone to his earlier criticism of the "intellectual," Darmstadt-style performances of Op. 27 that one heard in the fifties and early sixties.² In preparation for his première performance of the piece, Stadlen undertook extensive coachings with

¹ Anton Webern, *Variationen für Klavier*, Peter Stadlen, ed. (Vienna: Universal Edition No. 16845, 1979); this quote is from "Webern's Ideas on the Work's Interpretation" by Stadlen, p. V. The reader should have recourse to this definitive version of the score (referred to as the "Performance Score" below) to gain the most from the present article.

² Stadlen's earlier essays include "Serialism Reconsidered," *The Score* 22 (Feb., 1958): 12-27, and "Das pointillistische Missverständnis," *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 27/3 (March, 1972): 152-61.

the composer himself, the results of which he documented in this edition. Its importance can hardly be overemphasized, for at present, it represents one of the very few ways for most of us to become acquainted with "authentic" performance practice in works of the Second Viennese School. To the extent that a genuine performance tradition for this music has existed, it has done so primarily by word of mouth, and unfortunately, as historical distance between the creation of the music and its latter-day interpreters increases, we are in danger of losing that oral tradition altogether. Thus Stadlen's edition is to be applauded, as is Richard Hermann's essay on Webern's Quartet, Op. 22,³ and Joan Allen Smith's recent attempt to preserve some of the oral tradition surrounding Schoenberg's music.⁴ At last a private performance practice is beginning to become a part of the public scholarly record. Whether continued work in this area will result eventually in general guidelines for authentic performance of this music, or whether the best we can hope for is an increase in the stock of historical anecdotes--and

³ "Some Uses of Analysis Towards a Performance of Webern's Op. 22 Movement I," *Winds Quarterly*, Vol 1 (Spring, 1981): 24-38, and (Summer, 1981): 19-23. Hermann presents a thorough analysis of the movement, and towards the end of the second part of his article (Summer, pp. 20-22), he lays down guidelines for an informed performance of the work, utilizing some of the same sources used here (notably, Stadlen's score of Op. 27). The reader will notice numerous points of agreement between the present essay and Hermann's article, which presumably preserves some of the ideas of Rudolf Kolisch, with whom Hermann studied Op. 22, and to whom his article is dedicated, in memoriam.

⁴ *Schoenberg and His Circle; A Viennese Portrait* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1986); see especially the chapter entitled "Performance Practices," pp. 103 ff.

consequently the continued necessity of approaching each work on an *ad hoc* basis--remains to be seen.

The present essay offers some ideas on both the structure of Webern's *Piano Variations*, and the relationship of that structure to Webern's own directions for the work's performance. To most theorists, and, one would hope, to many performers, the interaction of "authentic" modes of performance with structural aspects of the works in question is an appropriate--indeed, vital--topic of study, requiring no justification. But in the present case, the very existence of any relationship between a structural view of Op. 27 and Webern's performance directions has been the subject of debate. Indeed, it was Stadlen himself who first revealed bits and pieces of the Performance Score in an attempt to prove the irrelevance of theory to performance in this music.⁵ Moreover, it was Webern's advice, as expressed in our opening quote, that formed the linchpin in Stadlen's argument. Why did Webern give Stadlen this advice, and what are its consequences for any attempt to talk about performance and analysis in Op. 27? Clearly, these are questions that we must attempt to answer before we proceed further.

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⁵ Stadlen first discussed the playing of parts of the last movement, and announced Webern's direction that the performer should be concerned only with "how the work should be played, not how it was made" in "Serialism Reconsidered" (pp. 13-16). He discussed parts of the first movement in "Das pointillistische Missverständnis" (pp. 159-60).

Schoenberg's mistrust of analysis has been common knowledge for some time now. In a well-known letter to Rudolf Kolisch, Schoenberg tells his brother-in-law that he (Kolisch) has worked out the series of the *Third String Quartet* correctly. But Schoenberg goes on to ask Kolisch (who was one of the members of the Schoenberg Circle noted for his interest in the technical aspects of Schoenberg's music) whether "one's any better off for knowing it." He goes on to say:

My firm belief is that for a composer who doesn't know his way about with the use of series it may give some idea of how to set about it--a purely technical indication of the possibility of getting something out of the series. But this isn't where the aesthetic qualities reveal themselves, or, if so, only incidentally. I can't utter too many warnings against overrating these analyses, since after all they only lead to what I have always been dead against: seeing how it is *done*; whereas I have always helped people to see: what it *is*!⁶

⁶ *Arnold Schoenberg Letters*, selected and edited by Erwin Stein (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 164.

This opinion, voiced privately, seems to have been consistent with Schoenberg's public coaching technique as well.⁷ Always sensitive to the charge that he "constructed" rather than composed, Schoenberg may have preferred to keep analysis in the composer's workshop in order to avoid such accusations.⁸

I have quoted Schoenberg at some length because it seems to me that the similarities in syntax (unaffected by translation) between Webern's instruction to Stadlen and Schoenberg's remarks to Kolisch are more than accidental: consciously or unconsciously, Webern paraphrased the master only slightly, adapting his words to the specific demands of a coaching session. Thus the source of Webern's advice seems clear. Of course, that Webern followed Schoenberg closely here (as he did in many other matters of life and art) comes as no great surprise--nor is it any great consolation in the present regard. The dichotomy apparently remains unresolved: was Webern merely

⁷ Smith presents evidence that Schoenberg generally avoided discussion of theoretical or analytical issues while coaching rehearsals of his music: "Joan Allen Smith: In the rehearsals, did Schoenberg ever discuss more structural aspects of his pieces? Marcel Dick [violinist with the *Wiener Streichquartett*]: No. . . . What happened in his workshop, that was something that belonged to the workshop. . . ." *Schoenberg and His Circle*, p. 111. But as Smith remarks, Schoenberg's approach was variable; he was certainly more likely to bring up technical matters with someone like Kolisch, who was both closer to him and clearly interested in such discussion.

⁸ In the same letter to Kolisch, Schoenberg went on to say "my works are twelve-note *compositions*, not *twelve-note* compositions: in this respect people go on confusing me with Hauer, to whom composition is only of secondary importance." (*Schoenberg Letters*, p. 165)

reflecting the party line,⁹ or did he *really* regard the theory and analysis of the *Variations* as entirely separable from--if not irrelevant to--the guidelines for the work's correct performance? Without further testimony from Webern, yet to be uncovered, this latter question can hardly be answered with certainty. But when we consider that Webern is clearly bowing to authority in his advice to Stadlen--and when we turn to the Performance Score and note the correspondence of certain of his performance indications to key structural features of Op. 27--we cannot but wonder whether his advice is to be taken at face value.

Stadlen, however, takes Webern's words most literally, arguing for the irrelevance of theory first in "Serialism Reconsidered," an essay which is not really about the performance of Op. 27 at all, although that is the topic with which it opens. Stadlen begins by recounting features of the Performance Score that are most difficult to guess from a knowledge of the piece's structure--and features that fly in the face of the typical Webern performance style of the fifties (such as the pedal markings in the last movement, and numerous other "romantic" interpretive practices). "Little of all this is to be seen in the score and even less can be guessed from the context," he says, and concludes "it appears that an authentic performance of a Webern score is impossible without direct tradition."¹⁰ The conclusion is understandable in light

⁹ In the letter to Kolisch, Schoenberg also remarked that he had "repeatedly tried to make Wiesengrund [Adorno] understand this, and also Berg and Webern."

¹⁰ "Serialism Reconsidered," p. 14.

of the performances of Op. 27 which surrounded Stadlen at that time. But one might counter that if Webern had not been reincarnated as the "Darmstadt Webern" perhaps things would have been different: surrounded only by "correct" models of performance, perhaps we *could* guess more from context. But in any case, this is only the first step in Stadlen's attempt to remove the performance and experience of Op. 27 from the "theory" (as he sees it) by which the piece was composed. Eventually, after entering the key piece of evidence--Webern's own testimony--Stadlen proceeds to launch into a full-scale attack on the twelve-tone system, the real purpose of his essay.

Once Stadlen reaches his main topic, it quickly becomes clear that his version of "twelve-tone theory" is preoccupied entirely with the notion of serial ordering (even the formation of "chords" from row segments is impossible according to his narrow interpretation). Certainly one is tempted to say that such a "theory" is so hopelessly limited as to be irrelevant to much of the music itself, let alone its performance.¹¹ (In Stadlen's defense, it must be admitted that thirty years of hindsight and the considerably richer notion of "twelve-tone theory" that has emerged in the meantime make this much easier to see.) On the one hand, I would maintain, and hope to show, that a

¹¹ Stadlen is taken to task by Walter Piston, Roberto Gerhard and Roger Sessions in *The Score* 23 (July, 1958): 46-64. Gerhard remarks that Stadlen "seems so obsessed with the notion of 'serial significance' that . . . in all his argumentation he hardly ever touches upon one solitary *musical* aspect of the music" (p. 51). Stadlen answers his critics in "No Real Casualties?" *The Score* 24 (Nov., 1958): 65-68.

more sophisticated notion of "twelve-tone theory" can yield musical insights in an examination of Op. 27; but on the other hand, it is also important to point out that twelve-tone structure is not the only "structure" going on there, although one would never know this to judge from the many writings on this piece. The formal structures of all three movements, for example, are clearly examples of traditional thinking that Webern transports into the twelve-tone domain. And to cite another example, the long-range registral connections which I shall point out later in the last movement are of the greatest structural importance--and they are clearly articulated in the Performance Score as well--but their relationship to the row is not immediately clear, although that hardly makes them any less important to the piece. In short, such notions as "motivic structure" or "part-form" reveal significant structural aspects of Op. 27, despite the fact that these "structures" are not *per se* twelve-tonal. Moreover, the understanding of these non-twelve-tonal structural features often has profound implications for performance. It is ironic that Stadlen, who argues for the irrelevancy of "theory," falls victim to the same preoccupation with reducing the piece to "twelve-tone theory" (albeit in a simplistic sense) as other writers who argue for ultimate relevance of a more sophisticated brand of the same theory. In both cases, it is the piece that suffers.

It should be clear by now that I regard the quotes from Webern and Schoenberg as more indicative of the precarious artistic

circumstances under which these composers worked than of any real incompatibility between theory and performance in this music. But it is also important to realize that both quotes demonstrate that their speakers had a purely compositional theory in mind--one whose usefulness for performance was indeed quite questionable. (Perhaps the notion of analytical theory as a performance tool requires a certain historical distance between the interpreter and the music.)¹² We should also remember that the more sophisticated techniques of the twelve-tone system are in some ways clearer to us, and certainly more easily communicable to others by us, than they were to the pioneers of that system. Our technical vocabulary, the result of relatively recent research, simply was not there. Finally, whether we are able to explain Webern's behavior or not, the crucial issue for us is that the relevance of theory to performance is eminently demonstrable in the present instance, as I hope to show in what follows. Indeed, I would argue that only one who is completely aware of the piece's technical details (as only Webern was at that time) could have made such wonderfully apposite suggestions for its performance.

¹² Of course, most twelve-tone theory has been generative or compositional, and continues to be so. The analytical, or in the present instance, performance-analytical use of the theory is still extremely underdeveloped. One significant effort in this area is Michael Friedmann's "Motive, Meter, and Row: Conflicting Imperatives for the Performer in Two Schoenberg Piano Pieces" (paper read before the Society for Music Theory, National Conference, Yale University, 1983), which discusses performance-analytical issues in Schoenberg's Op. 23/5 and Op. 33b.

The Performance Score is not the only recent source of interest with regard to Op. 27. Aside from new research resulting from the Webern centennial,¹³ we also have at last a full account of all relevant historical information surrounding the work,¹⁴ which, in the present situation, is important, since it bears heavily on the controversy that has surrounded it. The present essay takes full advantage of these sources; as is clear from the foregoing, it assumes that analysis and details of performance may be discussed profitably in the same forum, and appropriately, it is directed to both theorists and performers of this work. That these two audiences are seldom addressed as one is understandable, for the difficulties in carrying out such a project are formidable. Although the present discussion has not been able to avoid them altogether, it is hoped that the importance of its primary objective will inspire a willingness in both readerships to tolerate occasional points that may seem either trivial or of dubious musical interest to one or the other.¹⁵

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¹³ *Musik-Konzepte Sonderbände Anton Webern*, vol. I & II, Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, ed. (Munich: Johannesdruck Hans Pribil KG, Nach. F. Kriechbaumer, 1983-84).

¹⁴ Hans Moldenhauer and Rosaleen Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern; A Chronicle of His Life and Work* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979). The newly published Webern-Steuer mann correspondence also bears on this problem (*Musik-Konzepte*, vol. I: 23-51).

¹⁵ This article is a revised version of a paper presented (together with a performance of Op. 27) at the national conference of CMS/NASM in Dearborn, Michigan (1983).

Moldenhauer's historical account of the composition of Op. 27 is of particular interest because it bears directly on one of the most controversial aspects of the piece: the meaning of the title *Variations*. Here we read for the first time the correct chronology of the composition of the *Variations*, documented through examination of the sketches. This chronology allows us to settle the controversy over the title once and for all, and to describe its meaning rather well. It might even be argued that a correct understanding of the term "variations" in this context is of more than anecdotal importance--that it affects our analytical understanding of the piece. Certainly, at the very least, it provides the proper basis on which to begin an analysis; thus, we shall now briefly review Moldenhauer's chronology.

In Webern's Sketchbook IV under the date October 14, 1935 may be found the title "Klavier-Variationen" and a sketch of the row.¹⁶ Although Webern started the actual composition two days later, a series of adversities, including Berg's death, brought the composition to a virtual halt: Moldenhauer reports that only four and a half sketch pages were covered in the next eight months. Eventually Webern set to work again, and after seven different beginnings, the composition of what was to become the *last* movement of Op. 27 was not completed until July 8, 1936. According to Moldenhauer, the draft consists of 88 measures, divided into a theme and seven variations. Ultimately IV and

¹⁶ Moldenhauer, *Anton Webern*, pp. 482 ff.

VI were discarded, reducing the piece to its present 66 measures. Incidentally, the elimination of variations numbered IV and VI is especially interesting, since, as we shall see shortly, "sections" 1-6, 2-5 and 3-4 are in symmetrical relationship in the final version. The question then arises: why discard variations numbered IV and VI--two numbers which would *not* be paired according to the symmetric plan of the final version? (Numbers "IV" and "VI" are not in symmetric arrangement regardless of whether one numbers the "sections" as a "theme" and seven subsequent "variations" or as eight "sections.") Did the original version of the movement not exhibit this symmetry?¹⁷

Moldenhauer goes on to say that four beginnings of what would eventually become the first movement are dated the 18th and 22nd of July, and that this first movement was ultimately completed on August 19. Preliminary drafts of the second movement date from the 25th and 29th of August, and the final version was begun on September 1 and substantially completed on the next day, although Webern changed the ending so that the final double bar is dated September 5.

To backtrack a bit, Webern reported in a well-known letter of July 18 that he had finished part of his new composition for piano: "The completed part is a movement of variations; what is evolving will be a kind of suite." And in a letter of July 26, he went on to say ". . .

¹⁷ Unfortunately, I am not yet able to answer this question. The sketch material is now housed in the "Moldenhauer-Archive in der Paul Sacher Stiftung," Basel, Switzerland, and is only available for study on the premises.

now I see that the *variations go on further*, even if they turn into movements of diverse types."¹⁸ With an accurate knowledge of the chronology of the composition, all of this seems to make perfectly good sense (that is, he wrote the last movement, and then went on to the first and second). But before Moldenhauer's description of the Sketchbook, most writers assumed that that "movement of Variations" was in fact the first movement, and as a consequence, many began to propose the most inventive and exotic meanings for the term "variations."¹⁹ To my knowledge, Kathryn Bailey was the first writer to suggest that if the third movement were assumed to be the first one

¹⁸ Moldenhauer, *Anton Webern*, p. 482.

¹⁹ This approach was certainly aided and abetted by Willi Reich, who propounded a most peculiar analysis which he claimed he had gotten from study with Webern. According to Reich, the first movement is a "three-part form" and "at the same time the theme and two variations;" the second movement is a "two-part scherzo" which is "simultaneously variations 3 and 4;" the last movement is a "small sonata form," consisting of "primary theme" (mm. 1-12), "transition" (mm. 12-23), "subsidiary theme and small coda" (mm. 23-33), "development" (mm. 33-42), and "abbreviated reprise" (mm. 45-66); this "small sonata" is "at the same time variations 5-12;" quoted by Friedhelm Döhl in *Weberns Beitrag zur Stilwende der Neuen Musik* (Munich, Salzburg: Katzbichler, 1976), p. 294. With some knowledge of the piece, this analysis, despite its alleged authenticity, presents so many problems that one is tempted to dismiss it outright. (How, for example, could one possibly get eight variations out of the last movement?--unless it refers to Moldenhauer's 88-measure draft.) Nevertheless, much of this analysis has been passed on by René Leibowitz (*Schoenberg and His School*, trans. Dika Newlin [New York: Philosophical Library, 1948], pp. 226-38).

completed, much of the mystery surrounding the title would disappear.²⁰

In truth, this mystery was probably a welcome one for many a Darmstadt writer, who preferred to think of the revolutionary Webern proposing a radical reinterpretation of the traditional notion of "variations." Whether or not the work itself demonstrates a revolutionary interpretation of the term is a question we shall not attempt to answer here. But it is clear now that the composer had something much more traditional in mind: starting with a fairly simple compositional technique which was analagous to traditional tonal variations, Webern then composed the remaining movements ("the variations go on further"). As we shall see, the second and third "variations" (or third and fourth sections) of the last movement introduce compositional techniques which then become the basis of the second and first movements, respectively. Of course, in reordering the movements for the final published version (certainly quite defensible when one considers their musical character), the end result was to become a kind of "variations in reverse," in which the "theme"--or perhaps we had better say the "row," since "theme" is certainly arguable here--only becomes apparent at the beginning of the last movement. Recently-published correspondence between Webern and Steuermann

²⁰ Bailey criticizes the Reich/Leibowitz version, maintaining that only the last movement is a "variation form;" in her estimation, Op. 27 is Webern's "first experiment" in combining closed and iterative forms. See her article, "The Evolution of Variation Form in the Music of Webern," *Current Musicology* 16 (1973): 55-70.

proves conclusively that these first eleven measures of the last movement are indeed the "theme" of the whole work:

In the same mail [as this letter] I am sending you a copy of my *Variations*, and would be very happy if my dedication [of the work] to you gives you pleasure. As I believe I have already told you, they are divided into three independent movements. I have not displayed the "theme" explicitly (at the top, as in the earlier manner). Almost against my wishes, it may remain unrecognized as such. (But I will not try to hide it from anyone who asks.) But perhaps it's best if it stays back there. (Naturally, I'll give it away to you immediately: it's the first eleven measures of the third movement.)²¹

²¹ "Ich schicke Dir mit gleicher Post meine "Variationen" u. bin sehr glücklich, daß Dich meine Widmung an Dich freut. Wie ich Dir, glaube ich, schon angedeutet habe, sind sie in für sich abgeschlossene Sätze [drei] aufgeteilt. Ich stelle auch das "Thema" gar nicht ausdrücklich hinaus [etwa in früherem Sinne an die Spitze]. Fast ist es mein Wunsch, es möge als solches unerkant bleiben. [Aber wer mich danach fragt, dem werde ich es nicht verheimlichen.] Doch möge es lieber gleichsam dahinter stehen. [Es sind--Dir verrate ich es natürlich gleich--die ersten 11 Takte des 3. Satzes]." *Musik-Konzepte*, vol. I, pp. 32f. In this letter (III) and a subsequent one (VI) Webern asks Steuermann to play the *Variations* in Vienna; in the next letter (VII) he reports that because of uncertainty over whether Steuermann will come to Vienna, he has entrusted the performance to Stadlen. Although Steuermann studied the piece and taught it to students, he never did play the *Variations* in public, remarking that "apart from personal reasons, I have not yet found the time to study them to the perfection they require." (Gunther Schuller, "A Conversation with Steuermann," *PNM* 3/1 [Fall/Winter, 1964]): 28.

Ironically, this last movement remains for many the most problematic one, since the analogy between it and traditional variation form rests almost entirely upon two factors: the preservation of the *temporal proportion* of the "theme" (the eleven measures), and the periodic change of rhythmic motive on the surface of the piece, which mimics the "motivic variation" technique of the traditional style. Döhl expresses a commonly-held opinion when he cites Op. 27 as evidence of "how Webern came to new discoveries in compositional practice awkwardly, through outmoded notions of form and vague analogies."²²

Whatever the problems that some find with the last movement, however, it remains the best way into the *Variations*, and it is here where we shall begin--where Webern began. Next, we shall turn to the second movement, and then finally to the first. Again following Webern, the referential prime form of the row will be the form which appears first in the last movement. Transposition numbers of P and I row-forms will equal the first pitch-class of these row-forms, notated by the pitch-class integers 0 through 11, with E^b set as 0 (for reasons which will become clear shortly). Thus, this first row is P0 (see Figure 1). The transposition numbers of retrograde and retrograde-inversions will be equivalent to their *last* pitch-class integers. Row-forms in the figures will be notated in pitch-class letter notation, with all "black keys" notated as flats. On occasion, it will be helpful to use

²² "wie Webern den neuen kompositionspraktischen Entdeckungen nur unbeholfen, mit überholten Formbegriffen und vagen Analogien, nachkommt." Friedhelm Döhl, *Weberns Beitrag*, p. 296.

the terminology for unordered pitch-class sets developed by Forte²³ and others. This procedure will be found to be particularly useful in the first movement, where the appearance of prime rows against their retrogrades (and inversions against their retrograde inversions) tends to generate many new harmonic possibilities.

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Figure 1 shows the prime form of the row which serves as the basis of all three movements. Figure 2 shows the three row-forms which make up the "theme" of this variation movement. Significantly, the three forms--P, I and R--already foreshadow what Döhl calls the "horizontal symmetry" of the first movement where P-forms are placed against R-forms, as well as what he calls the "vertical symmetry" of the second movement where P-forms are placed against I-forms. Furthermore, the choice of E^b as starting pitch of both P- and I-forms produces a kind of horizontalized inversional symmetry around A and E^b, precisely the axis of *vertical* symmetry in the second movement. (The dyads formed by placing P0 over I0 in Fig. 2 are precisely the harmonic material of the second movement.) Note the exchange of pitch-classes C and G^b, which are placed strategically in the center of the row. This feature is quite audible when we compare measures 3 and

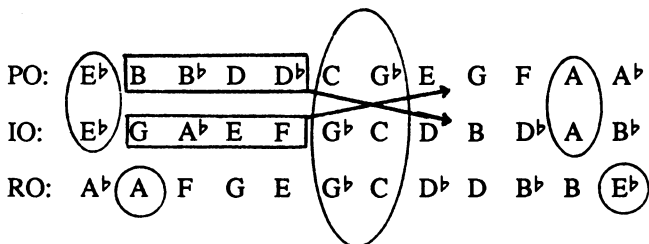
²³ Allen Forte, *The Structure of Atonal Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

7, and it is one of the features which links I- and R-forms, where the same exchange takes place. Indeed, a surprising number of correspondences between I- and R-forms arise when we examine the two forms more closely: C and G^b exchange in both; E^b and A remain invariant under I while they exchange under R, and the remaining four pitch-classes of each row-half exchange under both operations (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 1: PRIME FORM OF ROW

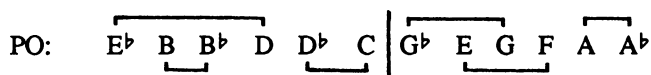
PO: E^b B B^b D D^b C G^b E G F A A^b

FIGURE 2: "THEME," MM. 1-11



Another structural feature of the row which is of interest is the fact that each hexachord may be seen as a disordered half of the total chromatic. Understandably, each half-chromatic hexachord is saturated with interval-class 1s: five, to be exact, the largest number possible in any hexachord. Thus Döhl, and especially Westergaard,²⁴ have commented that the row can be heard as a series of conjunct and disjunct interval-class 1s, as shown in Figure 3:

FIGURE 3



This feature will become even more obvious when we examine the theme's rhythm. The demand for the completion of this half-step pattern is exactly what gives the sense of incompleteness and expectancy at the end of the second phrase (m. 3). Upon turning to m. 4 of the Performance Score, we find evidence that Webern himself may have heard the phrase this way: note the *accelerando* which Webern

²⁴ Peter Westergaard, "Some Problems in Rhythmic Theory and Analysis," reprinted in *Perspectives on Contemporary Music Theory*, Boretz and Cone ed. (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 234.

demands, propelling the performer into the last phrase and completing the half-step pattern.²⁵

As many have noted, the rhythmic structure of the theme tends to accent this half-step property of the row. The diagonals with arrows which we find in mm. 1-2, and mm. 7-8 and m. 10 of the Performance Score²⁶ also seem to indicate that Webern was quite concerned with this property and the "compound melodic" implications resulting

²⁵ In the absence of any standard terminology here, I shall follow Westergaard in using the term "phrase" to describe clear compositional units smaller than complete row statements. In describing complete row statements which function as compositional units I shall use Döhl's term, "period." (My "phrases" correspond to what Klammer calls "groups" in his analysis [see footnote 39]; he refers to "variations" as "group aggregates.")

²⁶ These are among the many performance indications which Stadlen remembers from his coachings with Webern; they are reproduced in green, in order to distinguish them from the marks which Webern himself placed on the score (in red).

therefrom.²⁷ Perhaps the most amazing feature of the pitch structure of

²⁷ Such "compound" implications have generated interesting recent thinking about these opening bars. For example, Christopher Hasty gives a detailed reading in his article "Rhythm in Post-Tonal Music: Preliminary Questions of Duration and Motion," *JMT* 25/2: 183-216, this discussion on pp. 194-207. David Lewin links the various motivic settings of interval-class 1 with the attack points which characterize each. For example, he links the E^b whole-note with the D whole-note 5 quarters later (which, in turn, is 5 quarters earlier than the next C[#]), the B with B^b 1 quarter later, etc. See his *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 38-44. It should be noted that Stadlen disagrees with all of this "compound melody" discussion: "[The Performance Score indications] are the visible traces vividly remaining in my memory of his vision of an essentially one-part line (despite the occasional overlappings and the two added notes in mm. 3 and 7), which only becomes two-part in mm. 10 and 11 Thus the short and long notes do not represent two various, contrasting levels or voices [The] assumption that the two single tones (that is, the two which do not belong to a two-note motive--E in m. 3 and D in m. 7) strove towards the F in m. 4 and the C[#] in m. 7 respectively in order to "complete" in this fashion two further two-note groups is made untenable through phrasing marks of Webern, who incidentally made his intentions clear by declaiming, conducting, and singing" [Dies sind . . . die sichtbaren Spuren seiner mir lebhaft in Erinnerung gebliebenen Vorstellung eines im wesentlichen einstimmigen Gesanges (trotz der gelegentlichen Überschneidungen und der zwei zusätzlichen Noten in den Takten 3 und 7), der erst im 10. und 11. Takt zweistimmig wird Die kurzen und langen Noten repräsentieren also nicht zwei verschiedend, kontrastierende Schichten oder Stimmen [Die] Vermutung, daß die zwei Einzelgänger, das heißt, die nicht einem Zweitonmotiv angehörenden Noten (e in Takt 3 und d in Takt 7), nach dem f in Takt 4, respektive dem cis in Takt 8 strebten, um auf diese Weise zwei weitere Zweigruppen zu "komplettieren," wird durch Weberns Phrasierungszeichen hinfällig, der übrigens seine Absichten deklamierend, dirigierend und singend klar machte.] "Das pointillistische Missverständnis," pp. 157-8. Reich would be of a similar opinion: his notes contain the statement that "the treatment of the row in this movement is 'one-part' throughout" [Die Führung der Reihe ist in diesem Satz durchweg "einstimmig"] (Döhl, *Weberns Beitrag*, p. 294).

the first two periods of the theme is once again highlighted by the rhythm: it emerges when we look at the "long notes" of this thematic section. The E^b of m. 1, the D of m. 2, the F[#], E and G of m. 3 and the F of m. 4 amount to an ordered presentation of the first hexachord of RI5. Likewise, E^b, E, C, D, B and C[#] from the next period form the first hexachord of R7.²⁸ Such "middleground" structures, though apparently not exploited in any systematic manner by Webern, will return in our discussion of the first movement.

As noted, the property of half-step saturation is important to the discussion of meter and rhythm in this thematic section, and thus we come somewhat obliquely to a subject which has long been controversial. Indeed, the largest segment of the literature dealing with this piece--and the one which stretches over the longest time frame--deals with the rhythm of this theme. In essence, the controversy begins with Boulez's assertion that in Webern's music--as opposed to that of Berg and Schoenberg--the notated meter is purely a matter of convention and is not meant to be heard.²⁹ This of course is perfectly consistent with the notion that the rhythm in this movement is the result of a rhythmic series--a notion which I assume Boulez may have entertained. The effort to see Op. 27 as a kind of proto-total-serialized composition was later debunked by Westergaard and others. What Westergaard says with respect to the second movement makes equally good sense here and

²⁸ Robert Morris has pointed this out to me.

²⁹ Pierre Boulez, "Propositions," *Polyphonie* 2me cahier (1948): 67.

in the first movement: "The point is that these characteristics [i.e., rhythm, dynamics, articulation, etc.] are still playing their traditional role of differentiation. They interact with one another and with pitch to clarify pitch relationships, sorting out for the ear those pitch relationships which are to shape the movement."³⁰

But this argument about "total serialism" aside, there still remains the very real problem of the audibility of the meter signatures in any of these three movements. Edward Cone, for example, finds "at least seven different time-divisions simultaneously functioning" in these first twelve measures of the last movement.³¹ Taking his cue from Cone, James Rives Jones describes multi-metric implications in detail in a later article.³² Yet no one meter can assert itself for any length of time, for as Westergaard points out, the length of the first period is 13 halves--a prime, and thus all other meters are as easily destroyed as the 3/2.³³ The end result of all discussion pro and con is that the 3/2 meter *remains* problematic. However, Westergaard points out a number of factors which help to make the *half-note pulse* heard: if one notes the three pairs of rhythmic values in the first eleven bars (whole note/whole note; two quarters; dotted half/half--these are always

³⁰ Peter Westergaard, "Webern and 'Total Organization': An Analysis of the Second Movement of Piano Variations, Op. 27," *PNM* 1/2 (Spring, 1963): 109.

³¹ Edward T. Cone, "Analysis Today," in *Problems of Modern Music*, Paul Henry Lang, ed. (New York: Norton, 1960), p. 44.

³² James Rives Jones, "Some aspects of rhythm and meter in Webern's Op. 27," *PNM* 7/1 (1968): 103-09.

³³ Westergaard, *Some Problems*, p. 232.

articulated by the half-steps to which I referred earlier), then it may be seen that despite the irregularity of the quarters, the second whole note of the whole-note pair is always on a downbeat, and that likewise, the half note of the half/dotted half group always occurs on a downbeat. Furthermore, the composite rhythm of each phrase reinforces the half-note pulse: while each phrase (with the exception of the seventh--upbeat to m. 10) begins on an upbeat, each one (no exception) ends on a downbeat.³⁴ Still, the only downbeat that really feels like one is the E^b of m. 12, where Cone locates his "structural downbeat" of the piece,³⁵ a notion with which Webern himself would probably have agreed, according to Stadlen.³⁶ The clarity of this downbeat certainly owes much to the fact that some regularity of meter begins to assert itself at the end of m. 9 and into m. 10, thus enabling us to hear m. 11 as a *ritardando* of 3/2 and m. 12 as the first clear downbeat of an ensuing 3/2 bar.

Upon examining the Performance Score, there seems to be little doubt that the 3/2 meter was more than a "notational convention" for Webern: note the accent marks added to the downbeats of 1 in mm. 3, 6, and 11, and to the downbeat of 2 in m. 7 and downbeat of 3 in m. 10 (in green). Their net effect is to keep the half-note pulse alive, and to aid the clearer metric articulation of mm. 10 and 11. The metrical problem at the beginning of the third movement is just one more

³⁴ Ibid, p. 231.

³⁵ Cone, "Analysis Today," p. 45.

³⁶ "Das pointillistische Missverständnis," p. 158.

instance of similar problems throughout the *Variations*, which Stadlen ascribes to the "dearth of coincidence between notes and beats." Stadlen goes on to say, "in those days in Vienna we used to say that Webern was nowadays composing exclusively on 'er' (derived from 'one-er and-er two-er and-er')."37

Finally, we cannot leave this theme without saying at least a few words about the many performance indications of an "affective" sort which Webern has added ("elegisch, exaltiert, nachdenklich," etc.)--easily the most striking feature of this page of the Performance Score. These may be more instances of Döhl's "vague analogies," but they play a vital role here. One need only recall the old "anti-romantic" readings of this piece--performances that aspired to the Darmstadt ideal of a cool, intellectual sound, as removed as possible from "nineteenth-century" piano playing. In some quarters the opinion is still held that the piece is "... a typical product of Webern's late creative period. The variations are permeated with sublime expression, but they are far removed from romantic excesses of feeling. Their substance is formed of soft, crystalline sounds, coined of nobility and exquisiteness, but at the same time of a seriousness of thought--of an immersion in the

37 "Serialism Reconsidered," p. 14.

beauty and harmony of the world."³⁸ Regardless of what one thinks of this view when applied to the performance of Webern's other music--and I would maintain that it can be dangerous there as well--there is no doubt that it is particularly dangerous when applied to this piece. Timbral distinctions come out in Webern's ensemble pieces no matter how one plays them, but in this solo piano piece one must work to introduce this dimension into the piece. The "affective" directions are a help in doing this, influencing the performer, as they do, to utilize different touches, different nuances; the "voicing-out" of certain pitches plays a similar role here and in the first movement, as we shall see. Indeed, perhaps the best way to think about this "theme" (and the rest of the movement, for that matter) is to imagine the way in which Webern might have orchestrated it: this makes all the more sense when one reads Webern's "quasi vibrato" over the D in measure eleven, just before the cadential E^b returns in the register of the opening in the next bar (Cone's "structural downbeat," which Webern singles out with the indication "dying away").

Let us now turn our attention to the variations, which, strangely enough, have engendered far less discussion than the theme.

³⁸ Juri Cholopov, "Die Spiegelsymmetrie in Anton Weberns Variationen für Klavier op. 27," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 30/1/1 (1973): 29. [Diese Klaviervariationen sind ein typisches Produkt der späten Schaffensepoche Weberns. Sie sind von sublimarer Expression durchdrungen--romantischem Gefühlsüberschwang stehen sie fern. Sanfte kristalline Klänge bilden ihr Material, geprägt von Adel und Erlesenheit, aber zugleich von Seriosität des Denkens, von Versenkung in die Schönheit und Harmonie der Welt.]

In this regard, we note that Webern begins the piece with the advice that "the numerous tempo changes indicate every time the beginning of a new sentence" ("sentence" is Stadlen's translation of *Satz*). The exact meaning of *Satz* is unclear here; although tempo changes do frequently delineate *phrases*, they *always* delineate "variation movements." In the Performance Score, these "movements" are delineated by Roman numerals, which somehow never found their way into the original published edition.

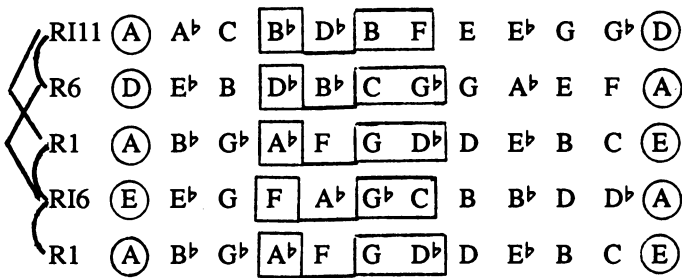
Klammer begins his analysis of this last movement by announcing that he "will not take in the thematic structure of the piece, since that is something quite foreign to serial thought, and has nothing to do with Webern's personal achievement."³⁹ Ignoring thematic structure is perhaps a reasonable tact to take with regard to the second movement, but such a plan can never yield an analysis of the third movement, but only theory of the most self-serving sort. The first variation (m. 12) illustrates this point well, for it rests upon motivic references to the "theme." For example, compare mm. 2-4 of the theme with mm. 14 (2nd beat)-15 in the first variation (the third phrase of the theme is compressed), or compare m. 11 with m. 16. Internal motivic correspondences are apparent as well (c.f., upbeat to m. 15 and first beat of m. 14 with m. 17). These help to delineate *irregular* phrase and period lengths, which are in stark contrast to the balanced periods of the

³⁹ Armin Klammer, "Webern's Piano Variations, Op. 27, 3rd Movement" in *Die Reihe Anton Webern* (Bryn Mawr: Presser, 1958), pp. 81-92.

theme; this is also one of the few points at which Reich's analysis seems to make sense (he calls mm. 12-23 a "transition"). The variation builds to a climax with Webern's marking "move on" in m. 19 and the registral extreme G^{#3}. This is prepared by the F^{#3} of m. 16, and in a longer-range sense, by the F3 of the theme. The *fortissimo* marking underscored by Webern's "hard staccato" and his cut-off immediately before it make this all the more obvious. Finally, after the diminuendo and ritard in m. 21, Webern circles the A^b at the end of the bar, which seems to indicate that it should be heard as the echo of the climactic G^{#3}. The exact repetition which precedes both tones (c.f., m. 18 with m. 21, and note that Webern has grouped the D with the succeeding pitches) reinforces this point. This "prolonged" G[#] will acquire even greater significance later. The variation ends with a clear motivic reference back to its beginning, the most obvious features of which are the F-A^b figure and C-B and D-C[#] sevenths. With regard to row technique, this variation is the "freest" of the lot--that is, row choices are not determined by any strict scheme. Seven rows are stated within this eleven-bar span. This amounts to a considerable acceleration in "row rhythm" over the three rows of the theme stated during the same

time span, and further supports the "transitional" character of the passage.⁴⁰

FIGURE 4: 2ND VARIATION, MM. 23-33



Variation II picks up with the pitch-class missing from the last aggregate of Variation I: the A of m. 23. This sort of common-tone row linkage is important throughout the piece, and in Webern's music in general; the demand for that missing pitch-class in the aggregate plays an important role in the first movement, as we shall see

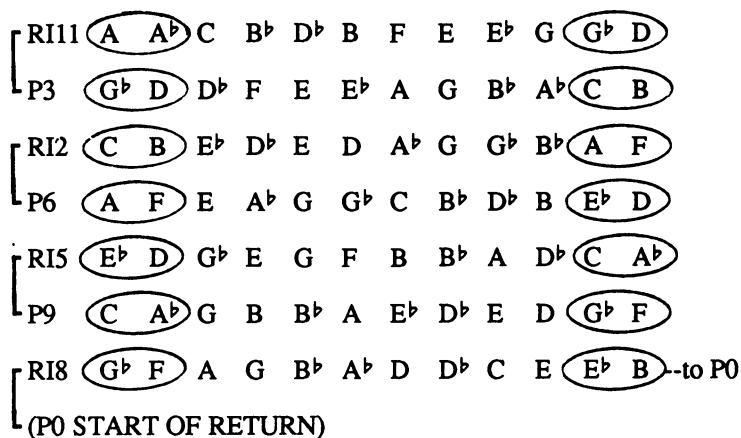
⁴⁰ I suggest that this is, to a certain extent, analogous to the acceleration in "harmonic rhythm" that one often finds in tonal transition sections. But I hasten to add that the inventor of the term "harmonic rhythm" would probably have disagreed; in his response to Stadlen, Piston claims that "harmonic rhythm, the rhythm of root change, seems to be lost to music of twelve-tone technique The constant presence of all twelve tones creates a motionless harmonic texture just as it previously did in styles of overdone chromaticism" (untitled response to Stadlen, *The Score* 23 [July 1958]: 46-9).

later. Figure 4 gives the row layout for this variation. First of all, the circles at the beginnings and ends of rows show the common-tone overlappings. The boxes and circles starting with the fourth row element in each case show the trichords and associated pitches which occur in mm. 24, 26, 31 and 33. Obviously, since in all cases the same row order numbers are involved, the same pitch-class sets are formed. These are further highlighted by the ritards at these points (and Webern's added pedal indications). It is important to note that the trichords are all of the 016 variety (Forte's "3-5"), which plays such an important role throughout the piece. The succession of rows is a masterpiece of "horizontalized" inversive symmetry. In fact, two sorts of interlocking inversive symmetries are going on here at the same time. First of all, the row pair RI11/R6 is symmetric around $F\#/F$ (read the vertical dyads formed between these two row-forms in Fig. 4). The same figure also shows that the row pair R1/RI6 is symmetric around $F\#/G$ --the *inversion* of $F\#/F$ (dyads formed here are the inversion of the previous ones). Meanwhile, one may also read an overlapping inversive symmetry between RI11/R1 and R6/RI6; both of these row pairs are symmetrical around the $A-E^b$ tritone, the importance of which has been noted previously. While the first inversive symmetry may be the more audible--especially when the chords enter--it is the second from which Webern developed the material of the second movement. The entrance of the fifth row in this variation (a repetition of the third row) has the effect of upsetting this balance;

thus it seems to bring to a cadence what otherwise would be left hanging in perfect balance.

The third variation needs little explanation. The kinship with the previous variation is obvious: the quarter-note motives are accelerated from the previous; meanwhile, the chord continues to play a similar role. But now the symmetry turns out to be of a retrograde (palindromic) type, rather than inversive symmetry. (As is obvious, this palindromic symmetry holds for all domains.) Again, five rows are stated: the first four consist of two retrograde-symmetric pairs, while the fifth (beginning in m. 42) has a cadential effect similar to the fifth row in the previous variation. It is this variation which grew eventually into the first movement.

FIGURE 5: 4TH VARIATION, MM. 45-55



Just as the second and third variations may be linked, so too may the first and fourth.⁴¹ Seven row-forms were stated during the first variation; likewise, seven row-forms are stated during the fourth. Furthermore, the first variation acted as a rhythmically and harmonically active bridge between the theme (which had a certain balanced and hence static aspect to it) and the largely static middle section, consisting of the second and third variations. Likewise, rhythmic and harmonic activity return in the fourth variation, which acts as a kind of retransition between the middle section and the return of the opening material in a transformed, and even more static, state. Figure 5 shows the row succession, which is considerably stricter than that of the first variation, however. An RI is paired with a P-form such that the last two pitch-classes of the RI overlap the first two of the P-form. This overlapping procedure is then continued by transposing each row pair through the cycle of $T=3$. Given the beginning of the cycle on RI11, the end must be the "tonic row," P0, which begins the last variation. With regard to performance, note the many slurs and diagonals--what Stadlen calls "anti-pointillist manifestos," all of which

⁴¹ This brings up one of the biggest problems with Reich's analysis, in which mm. 45-55 are the first part of the "abbreviated reprise." Given the obvious parallelism with mm. 12-23, the more plausible "sonata analysis" would seem to regard this as a "retransition."

indicate that despite the varying registers, the continuity of the line (and Stadlen would certainly regard it as a single line) is essential.

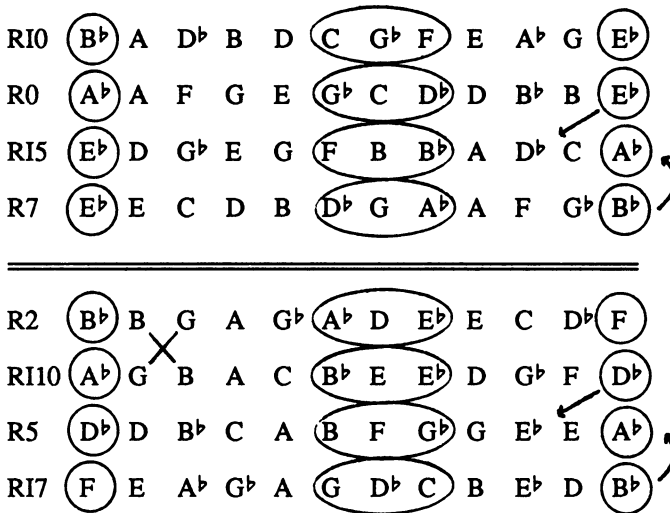
The most important formal function of this variation is its achievement of the registral highpoint and climax of the piece, after which the final variation functions as a sort of epilogue or coda. Note first the F[#]3 in m. 46, the G3 in 48/49, the return of the F[#]3 in 51/52, and finally the achievement of the A3 in 53/54, which serves as both the climax of this variation, as well as the climax of the piece as a whole. This is all very clear in the Performance Score, for Webern has added the indication "highpoint" in m. 54, just as he had emphasized the earlier G[#] in m. 19. His added pedal marks serve also to reinforce an otherwise sparse-looking texture at this climactic moment, as do his added dynamic markings. To understand the long-range structure of the movement, it is important to recall also the G[#]3 high-point of the first variation (it is the missing half-step here), as well as the F3 of the theme, which prepared this ascent initially (and fills out the chromatic segment). Undoubtedly, this chromatic ascent is the long-range manifestation of the chromatic aspect of the row itself, which we noted towards the beginning of this discussion.

The return of the "theme" (m. 56) in a highly transformed state is also marked by a significant registral event: the entrance of the opening pitch-class E^b in its new, low register. Indeed, new lower registral limits play an important cadential role in this return. Note the E^b/C of m. 61 and the D/B in the last bar. In fact, the final B is the

lowest note of all three movements. Although six row-forms are stated in this last section, the three pairs are collapsed into one another with a number of pitch-classes doing double duty, so that the net effect is closer to that of three row-forms. Moreover, the initial row pair is the P0/R0 pair of the theme, while the remaining two row-pairs in the section were clearly chosen for segments in common with the P0/R0 pair. To summarize then, Webern attempted to solve the problem of closure associated with variation form through the return of the opening row-forms, the use of three pairs (which link with the opening three rows), the use of new lower registral limits, *pianissimo* dynamics and the verticalizing of row segments. And to summarize the form of the piece as a whole, recall that the theme links with the final variation by virtue of three rows/row-pairs stated, that variations I and IV are transitional and state seven rows each (and reach upper registral limits), and that II and III form the "static" middle section, stating five rows each.

This idea of varying harmonic rhythm or "row rhythm" will return in our discussion of the first movement, but now we shall take a look at the second movement, where row rhythm is constant throughout.

FIGURE 6: SECOND MOVEMENT



The second movement is by far the most discussed of the three, so this analytical summary will be brief; then we shall turn to the Performance Score. The binary form is obvious, and figure six shows the row layout for the two sections. The general spirit of the piece is that of a scherzo (Webern likened it to the "Badanerie"--the last movement of Bach's *Orchestral Suite in B minor*). Technically, P-forms are presented throughout the piece against I-forms in canon at the distance of an eighth note (in the present analysis, since the row-form of the last movement is taken as referential, Rs are presented against RIs--which amounts to the same thing). Figure 6 shows that the row-pairs are always in TOI relationship, which makes them symmetrical

around A/Eb. The circles in figure 6 show that the last dyad of each row-form overlaps with the first of the next. Moreover, the dyad B^b/A^b serves as a structural guidepost at the beginning and end of each section, and hence must be formed at the beginning or end of each row pair. Thus the form is closed: only these four row-pairs (or their retrogrades, obviously--the P/I pairs) satisfy this condition. Essentially, each half of each row pair consists of a succession of dyads drawn from an even-interval inversive cycle: A/A, B^b/A^b, B/G, C/G^b, D^b/F, D/E, and E^b/E^b (read these vertically in figure 6), and hence one might regard the succession of rows rather as a way of generating different permutations of the six dyads. With regard to register, it will be seen that some pitch classes occur in more than one register, while others are fixed registrally, but all registral pitches are "balanced" symmetrically so that the axis of *registral* symmetry throughout the piece is A1. Westergaard describes the ways in which patterns of rhythmic motives, dynamics, attacks, etc. interact with pitch structure.⁴²

Now to the Performance Score. First of all, we note that Webern's general performance direction at the top of the page describes precisely the dyadic permutations we have noted: "'ever-varied intermingling' of two-note groups, each of which retains its own character. 'The repeated notes . . . [the registral axis of symmetry] always a shade hesitant'." And Roy Travis's analysis of the piece in 3/8

⁴² See footnote 30.

notwithstanding,⁴³ Webern shows himself again to be a firm believer in the notated meter, this time 2/4: note the accents added in mm. 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10. Furthermore, the accents in mm. 4 and 9 substantiate Westergaard's notion that the quarter-note meter is articulated by the *lower* of the two chords in the chord-pairs. Let us look now at the B section, which contains some particularly interesting markings. One of the most interesting features of the row-pair R2/RI10 is the "voice-exchange" G-B/B-G, which occurs right after the B^b/G[#] pickup. This row-pair is the only one of the four in which each hexachord of the row does not contain a *single* appearance of *each* of the six inversional dyads. The repetition of dyads *within* a hexachord certainly increases the potential for such voice-exchanges (although a potential voice-exchange at the boundary between hexachords exists in the first pair). (With regard to overall form, the closer juxtaposition of dyads which elsewhere were separated between hexachords might be regarded as "developmental" or "digressive.") Webern takes full advantage of this property: significantly, the B and G in these registers (they do occur in others as well) constitute the high and low registral extremes of the piece; and the very next figure is the zero-point of registral symmetry--the two As. This seems to me to be one more example of the "Haydnesque wit" upon which Westergaard has remarked, and Webern's insistence upon hand crossing should be understood in this light: "the

⁴³ "Directed Motion in Schoenberg and Webern," *PNM* 4/2 (1966): 85-89.

difficulty of playing these four notes in tempo produces just the right character; impossible if comfortably distributed." This sort of situation, in which the performer struggles against mechanical, pre-compositional schemata has its place in the first movement as well. The important thing here is that it is the human struggle which is an important ingredient, not merely the schemata themselves. Finally, we note also the circled notes in mm. 15 and 19. Here Webern seeks to bring out voice exchanges which might not seem as obvious. The caesura⁴⁴ before bar 16 substantiates Westergaard's idea that the climax of the piece is in m. 15 (the register of the chords, as well as the sequence of dynamics in mm. 13-15--*p*, *f* and *ff*--lead him to this conclusion). The voice exchange (second beat of m. 15) functions as a kind of echo, serving also to "prolong" the dyads exchanged, as do the voice exchanges in mm. 13 and 20.

FIGURE 7: FIRST MOVEMENT; CIRCLED TRICHORDS ARE ALL 3-5



⁴⁴ See Stadlen's "Webern's Ideas" for an explanation of the various notations added.

Let us now look at the first movement. The ABA form of the movement is clear--certainly much clearer than Reich's alleged "variation form." Just as the second movement had used the technique which Döhl called vertical symmetry (P- against I-forms), the first movement consists essentially of Döhl's *horizontal* symmetry--P- against R-forms. And just as the second movement was a "further variation" of the second variation in the last movement, this is a further variation of the third one. Figure 7 shows the opening row-forms (mm. 1-7). Of particular interest here is the fact that the 016 trichord almost completely saturates these P/R palindromes. Only the middle of each row-form avoids the 016 trichord; at this point whole-tone trichords (026) are formed both horizontally and vertically. These further accent the tritone exchange alluded to earlier. Indeed, this exchange, marking as it does the point at which the P- and R-forms (or I- and RI-forms) cross one another, is one of the main features which is developed during the course of the movement.

A remarkable feature of the Performance Score is the manner in which Webern instructs the performer to "voice-out" certain "melody" notes in both the A section and its return. The derivation of these "melody" notes is itself an interesting phenomenon for further study, although like the "middleground" structure of the last movement theme, it has so far eluded systematic explanation. There is, however, a truly remarkable relationship in this first thematic period: if the two 016 trichords are taken together they form Forte's 6-Z41 hexachord.

(Indeed, this sonority pervades the movement, since it is the "secondary set" formed by the R combinatoriality used throughout. The last measure presents a particularly clear example.) It also turns out that the "melody" notes in these first bars form 6-Z41; all of this is shown in figure 8⁴⁵:

FIGURE 8: FIRST MOVEMENT; BOLDFACE PITCHES = 6-Z41

E F D [♭]				E [♭] C D			
B G G [♭]				B [♭] A A [♭]			
6-Z41				6-Z12			

As we move on in this A section, we note other remarkable set correspondences between P- and R-forms: in the second period (mm. 8-10), I- and RI-forms occur against one another displaced by one tone (the B in m. 7 is the first note of the I row); yet the same trichords are formed in both hands in m. 9, the same tetrachords in m. 10, etc. The climactic B in m. 11 achieves its power both through register (highest note in the A section), as well as the fact that it is the "missing note" from the previous palindrome. It is most important to

⁴⁵ The remaining "voiced-out" notes cannot be explained in this way, at least insofar as I am aware at present.

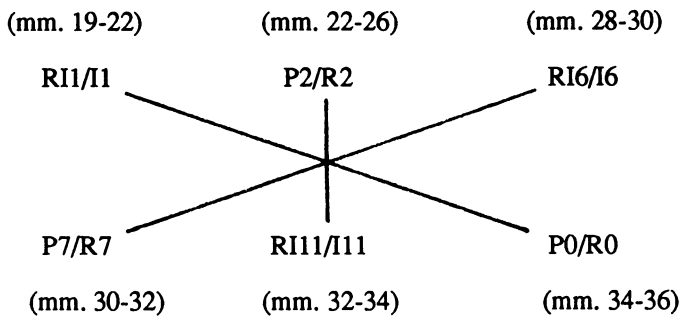
note the way a sense of cadence occurs at the end of the section due to features which run counter to the mechanical palindromes. Thus, while the first two palindromes are exact (mm. 1-7, and mm. 8-10), the third, which parallels the first (mm. 11 through first beat of 15), is palindromic with respect to pitch-class and rhythm, but both register and dynamics are in continual descent. Webern's addition of the break in m. 14 serves to underscore the diminuendo. The rest added to the last palindrome (m. 17, second beat), as well as the ritard, serve similar functions.

This tension between the mechanical palindromes and the actual rhythmic and registral setting of the rows becomes yet more pronounced in the B section, which itself may be divided into two parts: mm. 19-first note of 30, and mm. 30-36. Webern adds the indication "free, improvisatory" at the top of the page, and Stadlen notes that Webern compared this section to a Brahms intermezzo. The section commences with the missing B from the previous palindrome, and develops further the tritone row-crossing feature (compare mm. 12-13, 20-21, and 31). Each of these spots is the subject of Webern's commentary (in mm. 20-21, for example, Webern calls for a "hand-resolution only at the last moment--almost too late").⁴⁶ It is also

⁴⁶ Stadlen says that Webern "would invest these four notes with special intensity of feeling not only by an exaggerated *crescendo-decrescendo*, but also by letting the right hand relieve the left on the repeated note with as small a gap as possible Webern said that this would bring out the emotional content of these four notes that look simple and innocent enough on paper." "Serialism Reconsidered," p. 13.

important to note that the phraseology which Webern demands cuts across the mechanical palindromes.⁴⁷ They are obvious enough not to need "interpretation"; the essence of this section is rather a "free," improvisatory playing *against* the palindromes.

FIGURE 9: FIRST MOVEMENT.



(m. 37: recapitulation, P0/R0; m. 43, I0/RI0--c.f., last movement)

Figure 9 shows the succession of rows in the B section; note that the sense of "balance" in this section derives from the sort of "horizontalized" inversive symmetry which we saw in variation II in

⁴⁷ In a recent analysis of this movement Nicholas Cook agrees, remarking that "there are important aspects of phrasing which cut across the palindromes and the serial structure in general." *A Guide to Musical Analysis* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1987), p. 310.

the last movement (that is, the first movement owes more than merely the retrograde palindromes of variation III to the last movement). Here, the rows are all in T1I relationship. The placid symmetry portrayed by figure 9 is hardly the real story: in the actual music, we see that the first part of the B section is 11 measures long, while the second part packs the three parallel periods into a mere seven bars. Add to this the new upper register limit Db in mm. 32-35 and the rapidly alternating dynamics, etc., and the musical meaning of this stormy passage is clear.

The return (m. 37) relates back in two ways: it brings back the rhythmic/motivic material of the A section, while the row-pair is a retrograde of the last row pair of the B section. (The pitch "echoes" are clear.) The period from mm. 47-50 takes the registral descent which characterized the corresponding period in the A section and develops it further. After the "epilogue," as Webern calls it in m. 52, the movement closes on the "last sigh"--the hexachord 6-Z41, and what seems to be a clear tonal reference to the B^b/G[#] opening dyad of the second movement, almost inviting its performance *attacca*.

Chief among the lessons learned from the Performance Score is that the act of interpretation itself is both necessary and appropriate to this music--a revelation, to judge from the post-war performances of Op. 27. One is reminded of Schoenberg's assessment of the contemporaneous performances of traditional repertoire:

Today's manner of performing classical music of the so-called 'romantic' type, suppressing all emotional qualities and all unnotated changes of tempo and expression . . . came to Europe by way of America, where no old culture regulated presentation, but where a certain frigidity of feeling reduced all musical expression. Thus almost everywhere in Europe music is played in a stiff, inflexible metre--not in a tempo, i.e., according to a yardstick of freely measured quantities . . . It must be admitted that in the period around 1900 many artists overdid themselves in exhibiting the power of the emotion they were capable of feeling; artists who considered works of art to have been created only to secure opportunities for them to expose themselves to their audiences; artists who believed themselves to be more important than the work--or at least than the composer. Nothing can be more wrong than both these extremes.⁴⁸

Whether or not Schoenberg was right on the source of this tendency, it certainly characterized post-war performances of twelve-tone

⁴⁸ "Today's Manner of Performing Classical Music," *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), pp. 320-22; quoted by Smith, *Schoenberg and his Circle*, p. 109.

music as well (it would be ironic indeed if this new view of European music were attributable primarily to an American performance practice). Moreover, it was certainly at odds with the performance tradition of Schoenberg and his colleagues. True, Schoenberg's first preoccupation was with making what the composer wrote "sound in such a way that every note is really heard, and that all the sounds, whether successive or simultaneous, are in such a relationship to each other that no part at any moment obscures another, but, on the contrary, makes its contribution towards ensuring that they all stand out clearly from one another."⁴⁹ This tenacious pursuit of accuracy, however, was a natural reaction against the kinds of excesses characteristic of turn-of-the-century performance practice to which Schoenberg alludes in the quote above. Obviously, Schoenberg calls for a certain sense of balance and restraint, but never the mechanical rhythm and flat, emotionless dynamics heard all too often in performances of Op. 27.

What then *is* the relationship between structure and authentic performance in Op. 27? Clearly it is not a simple one, and certainly not as simplistic as Stadlen has claimed. In actual fact Webern's performance indications may be arranged along a continuum from those which closely parallel structural features of the piece to those which are largely irrelevant to them. But it is most important to mention indications which point to structural features not immediately retraceable to the row (the long-range connections in the last

⁴⁹ Smith, *Schoenberg and His Circle*, p. 105.

movement), and those which produce a tension against the structural segmentations, while certainly assuming their existence (the overlapping phraseology in the middle of the first movement).

The latter phenomenon is of particular importance, for if there is a difference between Schoenberg's and Webern's approaches to performance, it may be that Webern was the more emotionally exaggerated interpreter, while at the same time being the more "classic," restrained composer. The heavily marked Performance Score invites such speculation; it seems consistent with the many stories detailing Webern's long rehearsal hours devoted to a few measures, or his piano rendition of the Symphony, Op. 21 for Klemperer.⁵⁰

What at first may seem to be a peculiar dichotomy between Webern the composer and Webern the interpreter begins to make sense when we realize that it is precisely music which is as *clearly* "formal" as Webern's that successfully supports decisive, and even extreme interpretive decisions. The music is so clear that the interpreter may occasionally phrase *against* formal segmentations of the music without placing that dimension of the music in jeopardy of total loss (although

⁵⁰ Klemperer: "I couldn't find my way into [the Symphony]. I found it terribly boring. So I asked Webern . . . to come and play it to me on the piano He played every note with enormous intensity and fanaticism I said: 'You know, I cannot conduct it that way . . . I must do as well as I can.'" Moldenhauer, *Anton Webern*, p. 680; quoted by Stadlen, "Webern's Ideas . . .," p. V.

Steuermann recalls Webern's playing of his *Concerto for Nine Instruments*: "He played so freely that I could hardly follow the music, but it was extraordinary." ("Conversation with Steuermann," [see footnote 21], p. 28).

obviously one must have a clear understanding of just what one is "playing against"). Now that Webern has at last been emancipated from his post-war image, it is time to recognize that much of the beauty of this music exists in a kind of counterpoint between the eternal vision offered by its exquisitely-wrought, highly formal structure, and the free will of the sensitive, individual interpreter .