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Wayne Alpern

Webern’s Uniaggregational Recollection

Anton Webern uttered what is undoubtedly his most famous remark during a 1932 lecture when he recalled that over twenty years earlier in 1911, while composing the Bagatelles op. 9, he “had the feeling ‘when all twelve notes have gone by, the piece is over.’”¹ Some historians of twentieth-century music have construed this recollection as evidence that Webern actually anticipated Schoenberg in first grasping the twelve-tone principle of aggregation or chromatic completion.² Schoenberg, however, vehemently accused Webern of secretly exploiting his teacher’s aggregational idea with the intention of passing himself off as its originator.³ Recently, one Webern scholar has even suggested that the composer’s alleged memory of an early aggregational “feeling” reads more like a “rationalization after the fact,” falsely implying that he conceived of the notion before Schoenberg.⁴ Unfortunately, Webern never corroborated his suggestive recollection by pointing to a composition that actually ends once all twelve notes or pitch classes appear. The Bagatelles that Webern remembered having been working on at the time do not support his assertion, because they do not conclude after a single chromatic cycle.

There is one piece, however—and only one—that appears to corroborate Webern’s early uniaggregational memory: the third of his miniature Four Pieces for Violin and Piano, op. 7 no. 3. Unique throughout the history of music, this tiny work actually unfolds through a single aggregate of the twelve pitch classes, ending precisely once the twelfth note appears. In particular, one pitch class, G, is conspicuously absent during the entire piece, saving its only intonation for the final sonority. Observing this rather remarkable property, some theorists legitimately have con-
sidered “the principal rationale” of op. 7 no. 3 to be a single statement of all twelve pitch classes. Webern composed this brief work, however, in 1910—the year before he allegedly experienced his uniaggregational “feeling” in 1911 that the piece should end once all twelve notes have gone by. How then did this music come to embody a revolutionary twelve-tone idea that Webern himself only recalled having the following year?

A Legal Caveat

To solve this mystery, we must first delve into the history of Webern’s contractual affairs. After a meeting with Webern during the spring of 1914 at Schoenberg’s request, Emil Hertzka, the famous impresario of Universal Edition, promised to publish Webern’s Four Violin Pieces the following year. Universal’s commitment, however, was subject to a customary legal caveat known as an “Act of God” condition. Under this doctrine of law, contractual obligations may be suspended as a result of an unforeseeable intervening circumstance—an “Act of God”—such as a flood, earthquake, war, or other similar event outside of the parties’ reasonable contemplation or control, rendering performance of the contract either impossible or impractical. The concept of contractual suspension on the basis of an “Act of God” or force majeure is an ancient and venerable one captured by the hoary legal maxim, impossibilium nulla obligatio est—“there is no obligation to do impossible things.”

Having secured a promise from Universal, Webern’s Violin Pieces were certain to be published within a few months—unless some intervening bolt of lightning happened to strike. As Webern and Hertzka shook hands in the warm spring air of Vienna in 1914, there was little cause for concern. Europe was at peace, its cultural life thriving, a major firm had committed itself, and op. 7’s publication appeared inevitable. Basking in his recent success, Webern wrote serenely to Schoenberg on June 24, 1914, “Summer is a glorious time.”

The Assassination at Sarajevo

But four days later, lightning struck. On June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne of the Hapsburgs, arrived in Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia in the Balkans. As the Archduke’s motorcade slowly wound down Appel Quay along the banks of the Miljacka River, Gavrilo Princip, a twenty-year-old disciple of the Black Hand, a clandestine pan-Serbian nationalist society, lay in wait inside Schiller’s Store. Around eleven o’clock that morning, as the entourage passed Lateiner Bridge, Princip suddenly leapt off his stool, charged the open limousine and fired a shot severing the Archduke’s jugular vein. After botching a half-hearted attempt to swallow poison, the young zealot was captured and tried. He died of tuberculosis in his jail cell four years later. Today, Princip’s name is virtually unknown.

The assassin’s infamous “shot at Sarajevo,” however, rang out around the world with devastating repercussions. Austria was determined to destroy Serbian resistance and discourage further minority unrest, and the Archduke’s murder provided the req-
uisite excuse. Austria charged the Serbian government with instigation of the crime, and to the astonishment of the world declared war on July 28, 1914. Russia immediately mobilized to contain Austria and save its Slavic kin. Events rapidly snowballed as Germany declared war on Russia, followed by England’s and France’s declarations against Germany. By August 1, only five weeks after Webern’s blissful letter to Schoenberg praising the glories of the summer of 1914, the Great War sparked by Princip’s twist of fate in front of Schiller’s Store was raging. Four years later, millions would be dead.11

In the wake of this unexpected turn of events, Webern’s hopes for publication of his little fiddle pieces were abruptly plucked from his hand. The Archduke’s assassination and the ensuing conflagration constituted an “Act of God” compelling Universal to suspend its commitment. As a result, publication of op. 7 no. 3 was delayed for eight years—eight long and musically critical years, for it was during this period of incubation that Schoenberg developed the revolutionary twelve-tone concepts that would irrevocably alter Webern’s compositional thought.

The “Act of God” Revision

By 1922, well after the war, Universal finally reinstated its agreement to publish op. 7. Webern returned to his attic and dug out the score to prepare it for publication. At some point prior to print, however, Webern made a curious alteration to a tiny two-bar fragment in the third piece: he excised a sustained C in the violin of mm. 4-6, and he replaced a fleeting six-note figure, B–G–C♯–G♯–D–D in the piano left hand of mm. 5-6, with a descending three-note piano figure, A–C♯–D. Example 1 shows the original version, Example 2 the revision.12 Now why did Webern make this minute change—the “Act of God” revision in op. 7 no. 3?13

Example 1: Original version of op. 7 no. 3, mm. 4-6
Example 2: Published version of op. 7 no. 3, mm. 4-5

Since composers presumably revise their pieces to enhance rather than diminish their structural integrity, a comparative analysis of the original and revised versions in this case ought to reveal the latter’s superiority. Our investigation therefore begins by first examining how two prominent analysts, Allen Forte and David Lewin, have parsed the published version of op. 7 no. 3. Applying conventional set theory wisdom, both theorists ably demonstrate how the revised passage exhibits Webern’s meticulous organizational structure and organic coherence. Forte’s analysis, distilled in Example 3, illustrates how four of the initial notes of the piece, A–A♭–E–D, form set class 4–9 (0167), which plays an important structural role by recurring as a prominent violin ostinato later in the piece. His analysis does not account, however, for the 3–4 (015) trichord formed by the descending three-note figure, A–C♯–D, that Webern added in the revision. It remains unrelated to the initial 3–1 (012) trichord, A–B♭–Ab, and shows no apparent structural relationship to the remainder of the music.

Example 3: Set analysis, after Forte
Lewin’s analysis, encapsulated in Example 4, does a better, yet still incomplete job of integrating the revision. He segments the newly added 3–4 trichord by associating its last two notes, C♯ and D, with the sustained Eb in the violin, which yields set class 3–1 and thus balances the opening 3–1 trichord at the beginning of the piece. The remaining A in the revised trichord then joins up with the preceding B♭, forming a retrograde of the initial A–B♭ dyad. Lewin also succeeds in incorporating at least part of the revision into the structural background of the music, by showing how the combined registral boundary tones at the beginning and end of the phrase, A–A♭–E♭–D—the last tone of which is contributed by the revision—also form Forte’s initial 4–9 tetrachord foreshadowing the violin’s subsequent ostinato. The revision thus matches equivalent 3–1 trichords at the beginning and end of the phrase, spanned by a large-scale motivic 4–9 tetrachord in background.

**Example 4: Set analysis, after Lewin**

Unfortunately, however, applying these same prudent analytic procedures to the earlier version does not expose any comparative structural deficiency which the revision might have been expected to remedy. What we find, instead, is that the original passage is just as structurally sound—if not more so—than the revision. In its earlier incarnation shown in Example 5, the initial 3–1 trichord not only recurs at the end of the phrase just as Lewin observes in the revision, but in the middle as well. In addition, Forte’s opening motivic 4–9 tetrachord is balanced by another 4–9 iteration, G–C♯–G♯–D, occurring at the end of the passage. Beyond that, as depicted in Example 6, the boundary tones framing the original background not only compose out set-class 4–9 as Lewin detects in the revision, but they also unfold a large-scale statement of the motivic 3–1 trichord. Since the only two remaining unbeamed notes in Example 5, B♭–A, are a pitch-space retrograde of the initial A–B♭ dyad, every single note in the original version, unlike the revision, participates in a tightly organized, hierarchical structure saturated and framed by motivic sets. In short, from a set-theoretical perspective, Webern’s alteration seems to have made this piece less integrated, not more. If traditional set theory cannot account for this perplexing “Act of God” revision—what can?16
Example 5: 3–1s and 4–9s as surface motives

Example 6: 3–1 and 4–9 spanning the first phrase

Aggregate Background Structure

The key to this enigma lies buried in Webern’s haunting memory of an aggregational feeling that “when all twelve notes have gone by, the piece is over.” The term “aggregate,” first injected into music by Milton Babbitt, customarily refers to a complete statement of all twelve tones in a serial work. But an aggregational analysis can also be performed upon a nonserial atonal work such as op. 7 no. 3. Isolating the initial appearance of each of the twelve tones exposes the skeletal pitch-class framework or Aggregate Background Structure (ABS) of a composition. An ABS consists of one or more distinctly ordered, linear pitch class rows deeply embedded within the fabric of the music. It represents an Ur-motif or Grundgestalt in atonal music roughly analogous to a twelve-tone row governing a serial piece, or the Schenkerian Ursatz permeating the background of a tonal setting. Its progressive unfolding of the aggregate establishes a directional vector projecting the underlying pitch-class counterpoint of an atonal piece in terms of the total chromatic.

Extracting this linear pitch-class skeleton from the corpus of an atonal composition allows us to determine the number of complete twelve-tone cycles accumulating within the work, the rate of chromatic circulation, and the large-scale harmonic
rhythm of aggregate completion. More significantly, however, the specific linear succession of pitch classes allows us to dissect the internal organization of the ABS itself, much in the same way one would analyze a twelve-tone row. We can evaluate the relative distribution, density and pattern of progressive pitch-class entrances within the ABS, its segmental partitioning and symmetrical derivation from equivalent trichordal or tetrachordal subsets, its degree of penetration as adjacent or prominent notes on the musical surface, and the extent to which its background structure and transformations replicate local motivic patterns and transformations in the foreground.

Extricating the Aggregate Background Structure from the original and published versions of op. 7 no. 3 through a “twelve-count” yields some fruitful results in unravelling Webern’s perplexing revision. Tallying up each of the initial pitch class entrances in the two versions shown in Examples 7 and 8 reveals that in its original form, the most striking feature of this piece—its unique uniaggregationalism—did not exist. Unlike the revision in Example 7, the original version in Example 8 did not end once all twelve notes are heard. It consisted of two chromatic cycles, not one.

The comparative distribution of pitch classes within the original versus the revised Aggregate Background Structures illustrated in Example 9 sheds even more light on the revision process. Juxtaposing the ABSs of the two versions back-to-back discloses that the significant effect of Webern’s alteration was to pluck out the G, the second tone of the deleted passage in Example 1, in order to save what then became G’s only appearance for the final chord. Disrupting the two evenly balanced, gradually unfolding aggregates in the original piece, all of the other pitch classes in the revision except for G now pass through two full cycles. This produces a pair of incomplete eleven-note “pseudo-aggregates”—both of which are then completed by the final G’s belated appearance just before the double bar. Snatched from the first batch, the missing twelfth tone only shows up at the very end to finish off both collections. Yet, in sum, this lone straggler completes one single aggregate over the course of the entire piece. Fulfilling Webern’s memory of a uniaggregational feeling decades later, the revised version of op. 7 no. 3 thus ends, as the composer recalled, precisely once all twelve notes have gone by.

**Linear Aggregational Analysis**

Subjecting the Aggregate Background Structures of the original and published versions of op. 7 no. 3 to more detailed linear aggregational analysis demonstrates how Webern’s revision of this early atonal piece adumbrates his later serial practice and signals an important stage in the evolution of twelve-tone thinking. As a result of his alteration of just a few notes on the surface, Webern implanted deep within its spine a highly integrated linear ordering of the chromatic aggregate comparable in structure and function to the twelve-tone rows of his serial works.

The ABS of the original version shown in Examples 10 and 11 consists of two essentially unordered chromatic collections. Its two “atonal rows,” 9T8–320–E71–546 and 5E2–963–80T–471, divulge no significant organization or
Example 7: The published version of op. 7 no. 3

Sehr langsam ($= \text{ca. 60}$)

mit Dämpfer

Aggregat 1

am Steg.

PPP ohne cresc.

PPP

außerst kurz

PPP

col legno (weich gezogen)

PPP

PPP subito

PPP

kaum hörbar

am Steg

PPP

kaum hörbar
Example 8: The original version of op. 7 no. 3

Sehr langsam
mit Dämpfer
Aggregate I
am Steg

PPP

Aggregate II
col legno

PPP

sehr kurz und kaum hörbar

PPP

kaum hörbar
Example 9: Comparison of aggregate unfoldings in published and original versions

Aggregate I

Example 10: Overview of aggregate unfoldings in original version

Aggregate I

Example 11: Aggregate background structure of original version
consistent partitional scheme. Although the first is framed by two equivalent 3–1 (012) trichords, its two interior trichords forming set classes 3–2 (013) and 3–8 (026) are unrelated. And even though three of the four trichords in the second collection form set class 3–6 (036), the transformations between them are all different and the intervening 3–6 (024) trichord is unaccounted for. Neither the tetrachordal nor hexachordal partitions of the two aggregates reveals any systematic partitional structure.

Unordered chromatic fields such as this are undistinguishable and ubiquitous throughout Webern’s atonal music, as well as the atonal repertoire generally.

The ABS of the revision depicted in Examples 12 and 13, on the other hand, presents a dramatic contrast. Not only does a single, comprehensive twelve-note aggregate unfold through the background of the entire piece, but the linear topography of that integral structure typifies the internal organization and symmetrical construction characteristic of Webern’s later twelve-tone rows. Remarkably, the ordered sequence of the twelve pitch classes in the ABS of the revision, 9T8–321–E54–067, constitutes a trichordally-derived symmetrical “row” generated by two inversionally related pairs of equivalent trichords sharing an isomorphic transformational relationship. The first two trichords both form set class 3–1 (012), and the second two trichords both form set class 3–5 (016). The equivalent trichords in each pair are related to one another by the exact same transformation, I_{11}. This derivative structure of the ABS of op. 7 no. 3, generating a symmetrical ordering of the twelve notes from a single transformation of two trichordal subsets, significantly enhances its structural coherence and anticipates Webern’s later use of comparable derivational techniques as a crucial compositional trademark in his twelve-tone music.
The derivational and symmetrical construction of this ABS bears a conspicuously enigmatic resemblance to the twelve-tone row Webern used in his first completed serial work, the *Three Traditional Rhymes*, op. 17 no. 1 (1924), shown in Example 14. The trichordal partition of this row, ET5-678-349-012, forms set classes 3–5 / 3–1 / 3–5 / 3–1, closely paralleling the 3–1 / 3–1 / 3–5 / 3–5 partition of op. 7 no. 3’s ABS. These two structures are equivalent trichordal transformations of one another, generated simply by swapping their two exterior trichords.25

*Example 14: Row of op. 17 no. 1*

The vertical or “block” distribution of the notes of the aggregate throughout the texture of op. 7 no. 3 offers another glimpse of Webern’s later serial technique generated by the revision of this early atonal work. The sequence of twelve pitch classes is projected vertically across different parts instead of horizontally within a single voice, exerting a structural influence in the background instead of a thematic one in the foreground. Webern employed this same block topography in the majority of his early serial works, including op. 17 no. 1.26 Though not necessarily audible on the surface, the gradually unfolding ordered aggregate beneath the freely atonal surface of op. 7 no. 3 is a harbinger of Webern’s future practice and profound belief in the abstract organizational efficacy of the row as an imperceptible background structure, as opposed to a concrete theme or melodic gesture in the foreground.27

The radically different extent to which the opposing Aggregate Background Structures of the two different versions of op. 7 no. 3 replicate motivic structures on their respective musical surfaces is another index of the tiny revision’s profound impact on this music. Whereas the linear succession notes in the original ABS bears no organic relationship to the foreground, the revised ABS composes out the same motivic sets populating the surface as well. This replication or embedding of motives on multiple hierarchical levels of structure is another important compositional feature of Webern’s later twelve-tone practices anticipated by the revision op. 7 no. 3.

The five disparate structural trichords of the original ABS shown in Example 15, consisting of set classes 3–1 (012), 3–2 (013), and 3–8 (026) in the first aggregate and 3–6 (024) and 3–10 (036) in the second, are only weakly represented in the motivic foreground. Two of these trichords, 3–8 and 3–6, are absent entirely from their respective aggregational surfaces. Even the relatively few recurrences of structural sets require suspect segmentations. In sharp contrast, the two structural trichords of the revised ABS shown in Example 16, 3–1(012) and 3–5(016), virtually
saturate the motivic landscape as well. Indeed, these background trichords receive special emphasis in the foreground as the first three notes of the piece and three of the notes in the final verticality. This interpenetration of the structural background into the motivic foreground generates a highly unified organizational hierarchy, in which the linear sequence of the ordered aggregate gradually unfolding on the deepest level also is reflected and replicated by adjacent and prominent notes on the surface, such that a single comprehensive ordering of the twelve tones simultaneously serves both global and local musical functions.

**Example 15:** Motivic foreground structure of original version

**Example 16:** Motivic foreground structure of published version
Finally, quite unlike the original version of op. 7 no. 3, the internal transformations governing the linear disposition of the Aggregate Background Structure of the revision are isomorphic with significant transformations in the foreground, as illustrated by the analytic graph and transformational network in Examples 17 and 18. The twelve notes of the revised ABS are highlighted by upwardly stemmed open noteheads, partitioned into two hexachords labeled I and II, with beamed constituent trichords. The pair of equivalent 3–1 trichords in hexachord I, [Ab–A–Bb] and [C♯–D–Eb], are labeled X and X', while the two equivalent 3–5 trichords of hexachord II, [B–E–F] and [F♯–G–C], are labeled Y and Y'. Within each hexachord, the first trichord inverts to generate the second under a single isomorphic transformation, I₇₁. This isography is represented in Example 17 by horizontal arrows extending above the staff, indicating that:

\[ \text{X} \xrightarrow{I_{71}} \text{X}' \quad \text{and} \quad \text{Y} \xrightarrow{I_{71}} \text{Y}' \]

The hexachordal partitioning of the ABS also partitions the foreground into two corresponding sections. Within each section, the three notes comprising the first structural trichord X and Y in hexachords I and II of the ABS also constitute the first three notes of their respective surfaces. These two foreground trichords, [Ab–A–Bb] and [B–E–F] are labeled x and y, sharing the same noteheads as X and Y, but distinguished by downward dotted stems and beams. Since the pitches of the first trichords in each hexachord of the background are also the same pitches of the first trichords in the corresponding section of the foreground, X and x are equivalent and identical, and Y and y are also equivalent and identical. This identity between these trichords on different levels of structure is indicated in Example 18 by:

\[ \text{x} \quad \text{and} \quad \text{y} \]

Just like their structural counterparts X and Y in the background, these two local trichords x and y also both invert in the foreground under the same isomorphic transformation, I₇₁, to generate the final foreground sonorities of their respective sections. Trichord x, consisting of the first three notes of the first section, [Ab–A–Bb], thus inverts through the foreground by I₇₁ to become [C♯–D–Eb], the last three notes of the first section, labeled trichord x'. Likewise, trichord y, comprising the first three notes of the second section, [B–E–F], also inverts through the foreground by I₇₁ to become [F♯–G–C], three of the notes in the final chord, labeled trichord y'. The isomorphic transformation between the two trichords framing each section of the foreground is represented by horizontal arrows extending below the staff, indicating that:

\[ \text{x} \xrightarrow{I_{71}} \text{x}' \quad \text{and} \quad \text{y} \xrightarrow{I_{71}} \text{y}' \]

Once again, the pitch classes of the second trichord in each half of the foreground, x' and y', duplicate those of the second trichord in the corresponding hexachord of the background, X' and Y'. Here, however, only x' and X' actually share the
Example 17: Transformational isomorphism in published version

Hexachord I (3-1 Trichords)

\[ X \rightarrow I_{11} \rightarrow X' \]

\[ (\text{Ab A Eb}) \]

Background

\[ Y \rightarrow I_{11} \rightarrow Y' \]

\[ (\text{B E F}) \]

Hexachord II (3-5 Trichords)

\[ x \rightarrow I_{11} \rightarrow x' \]

\[ (\text{Ab A Eb}) \]

Foreground

\[ y \rightarrow I_{11} \rightarrow y' \]

\[ (\text{B E F}) \]

Example 18: Summary of transformational isomorphism shown in Example 17

\[ X \rightarrow X' \rightarrow Y \rightarrow Y' \]

\[ x \rightarrow x' \rightarrow y \rightarrow y' \]

same exact pitches, while \( y' \) and \( Y' \) comprise different but equivalent pitches. This equivalency relationship between \( X' \) and \( x' \) and between \( Y' \) and \( y' \) on independent levels of structure is indicated in Example 18 by:

\[ X' \quad \text{and} \quad Y' \]

\[ x \quad \text{and} \quad y \]

The transformation motivating the linear unfolding of the ordered aggregate through the background of the revision of op. 7 no. 3 is therefore identical to the transformation framing the actual motivic progression of the music in foreground, replicating itself between equivalent nodes on the two different hierarchical levels of structure. This organic regeneration of the background transformation in the foreground in op. 7 no. 3 metaphorically instantiates Schenker's notion of the "propagation of the Urlinie" in tonal music, or the "tendency to propagate the forms of the fundamental structure...through all voice-leading levels," generating the holistic...
transformational network depicted in Example 18.\textsuperscript{29} The four isomorphic inversionsal transformations, \(X \rightarrow X'\) and \(Y \rightarrow Y'\) in the background, and \(x \rightarrow x'\) and \(y \rightarrow y'\) in the foreground, are all represented by a single letter labeling horizontal arrows between their transformational nodes. The equivalency relationships \(X=x, X'=x', Y=y,\) and \(Y'=y'\) between corresponding nodes on the background and foreground levels of the network are represented by vertical arrows extending between them. Absolutely none of this transformational isomorphism exists in the original version of op. 7 no. 3.

This litany of remarkable structural features in Webern’s published piece, all absent in its original conception, clearly establishes that his alteration of a few notes did not merely reduce it to a single undifferentiated chromatic field, but also imparted a distinctive and highly organized order to the linear succession of twelve pitch classes. If only subconsciously, Webern exhibited an embryonic awareness of the structural potential of the \textit{ordered aggregate}—the essence of serialism—exerting its influence like a scaffold unfolding through the background of this atonal composition. While Webern’s atonal music, both before and after op. 7, is saturated with recurrent unordered collections in which the twelve tones roam freely, in this one instance he appears to have antiseptically quarantined a single aggregate and arranged its twelve notes in a linear sequence auguring the meticulously constructed rows of his later serial works.\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{Darwin Aboard the Beagle}

What can we conclude about this curious “Act of God” revision in op. 7 no. 3? From an analytic perspective, we now see how Webern’s slight alteration of a few notes had a profound rippling effect upon the underlying aggregational structure of the entire piece.\textsuperscript{31} By tinkering with a tiny handful of pitches, Webern not only reworked op. 7 no. 3 to unfold a single chromatic cycle, but he actually implanted a nascent precursor of a linearly ordered twelve-tone row within the chassis of this early atonal work. Perhaps as a result of its extreme miniaturization, reflected in his ascetic impression that “when all twelve notes have gone by, the piece is over,” Webern witnessed an intense magnification of focus otherwise unnoticeable under the courser lens of Schoenberg and Berg. By vastly reducing his field of observation to the twelve notes of a single aggregate, Webern could microscopically pinpoint their succession, like hydras squiggling past one another in a pure drop of water. For only then, in this miniaturized universe far from the busy chromatic textures of his colleagues, did the specific order of each of the tiny twelve tones \textit{actually matter}. Like Darwin carefully laying his sparrows onto a white sheet aboard the \textit{Beagle}, Webern placed each little note—one after the other—on the \textit{tabula rasa} of his ephemerous score.\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{Remaking the Past?}

But from a historical perspective, a different question arises: does the integral uniaggregatedism of op. 7 no. 3 corroborate Webern’s recollection of an early twelve-
tone premonition in 1911 preceding that of Schoenberg? When did he revise this little piece to make it end once all twelve notes sounded? The ongoing trickle of evidentiary clues culled from Webern’s archives suggests two possible outcomes, each with fascinating implications for the history of early twentieth-century music, and each casting the composer in a radically different light.

Under the first scenario, it was only following the war and long after his alleged uniaggregational “feeling” of 1911, that Webern went back and retroactively revised op. 7 no. 3 to unfold a single aggregate. There is solid evidence to support such a conclusion: Webern wrote the words *endgültige Fassung Sommer 1914*—“definitive version Summer 1914”—on the cover page of the original version. This inscription ostensibly dates the biaggregational original as the definitive version at the time the Archduke’s assassination suspended Universal’s agreement in 1914. It was therefore only after the war, and probably several years later in 1922 when he returned to prepare his Violin Pieces for publication once Universal reinstated its commitment, that Webern crept back to his attic, blew the dust off his early manuscript, and self-consciously revised it—over a decade after it was composed—to end once all twelve notes appeared.33

If this is so, Webern’s uncorroborated remark dubiously implying that he, not Schoenberg, had the aggregational idea first may indeed just be musical sour grapes. Although Schoenberg did not publicly announce his twelve-tone method until 1923, he completed his first serial piece, the *Präludium* of op. 25, in 1921. In an act of faith he later regretted, Schoenberg privately divulged his aggregational secret to Webern in 1922—conspicuously the very same year Webern not only went back and prepared op. 7 no. 3 for publication, but also made his own first twelve-tone attempt.34 And op. 17’s row mirroring the revised aggregate of his violin piece was just two years away. Webern manifested an unusually acute awareness of the historical significance of the twelve-tone method and his own role in its evolution around this same time by plunging obsessively into reorganizing and dating his sketches for future posterity.35 He also took the opportunity to go back and update other previously finished pieces whose publication similarly had been delayed by the war—in each case generating two different versions of the same work.36

If Schoenberg’s gnawing allegations of Webern’s infidelity and intellectual confiscation are worth any salt at all, might we not ponder under these circumstances whether the younger composer could have sought, if only subconsciously, to take advantage of Princip’s twist of fate at Sarajevo—an “Act of God” fortuitously delaying op. 7’s publication—by going back himself and attempting to “remake the past”?37 Surely suffering a Bloomian “anxiety of influence” at the foot of his over-bearing superior, might Webern have jealously reshuffled a few notes in his early manuscript upon learning Schoenberg’s secret, in order to unfold a single chromatic cycle—simply to plant false proof that his own twelve-tone idea preceded that of his mentor?38

**Vindication and Corroboration**

Conflicting new evidence of vindication and corroboration recently brought to light, however, suggests that Webern actually may have implanted the single aggregate in
op. 7 no. 3 well before the war, and perhaps even as early as 1911—the very year of his uniaggregational recollection. Only two weeks after the Archduke’s assassination during that fateful summer of 1914, the composer wrote a letter to an American violinist, Arthur Hartmann, indicating that the bow in the col legno ostinato in op. 7 no. 3 should be weich gezogen or “gently drawn.” Since this unusual qualification appears in the revised score but not in the original, which merely indicates col legno (compare the middle systems in Examples 7 and 8), the letter ostensibly dates the revision itself to 1914. The same letter further suggests that the ostinato was played in this distinctive fashion during a pre-war performance in 1912. Still other exculpatory clues recently sleuthed from the Webern archives appear to date the uniaggregational revision of op. 7 no. 3 even earlier, to some time shortly following its premier in 1911. Webern thus seems to have revised op. 7 no. 3 to unfold its single aggregate well before Princip’s “Act of God” derailed its publication during the summer of 1914. Rather than the mistaken Bagatelles of op. 9, might Webern actually have been recalling his uniaggregational revision of op. 7 no. 3 in 1911 when decades later he remembered feeling that same year “when all twelve notes have gone by, the piece is over?”

The Enigma of Priority

The historical implications of a pre-war revision of op. 7 no. 3 for the issue of priority are provocative. Schoenberg first experimented with the aggregate in a scherzo as early as May 1914, and later claimed to have told Webern about it at that time. Webern, however, conducted his own aggregational experiment of crossing off notes—a memory he recalled in the same 1932 lecture—in the abandoned sketch for Kunfttag III in April 1914, predating Schoenberg’s scherzo by one month. The debate over priority heats up considerably, however, if Webern revised op. 7 no. 3 to unfold a single aggregate as early as 1911. Schoenberg’s Harmonielehre published that same year contains a brief theoretical discussion of twelve-tone chords, yet quotes a passage from Webern’s 1909 Five Movements for String Quartet, op. 5 no. 1, unfolding an aggregate within a single measure.

But op. 7 no. 3 is a significant advance over earlier experiments in chromatic chords and unordered aggregate completion. Webern’s revision manifests nascent twelve-tone thinking not merely in terms of an undifferentiated chromatic field, but what appears to be a highly organized linear sequence of the twelve tones. A pre-war revision in 1911 anticipating Schoenberg’s 1914 proto-serial scherzo by three full years would not only corroborate Webern’s previously unsubstantiated testimony of an early twelve-tone premonition, but accord him priority over the father of serialism in his early experimentation with the ordered chromatic before the official dawn of the dodecaphonic age.

Still, despite the persuasive signposts pointing toward a pre-war uniaggregational revision of op. 7 no. 3, this portentous scenario is difficult to reconcile with other hard-boiled facts suggesting that it may only have been after the war that Webern self-consciously snuck back and retrospectively modified his old piece to ape or even upstage his mentor, once he gleaned the aggregational secret Schoenberg
later so bitterly regretted whispering. For if Webern previously had revised his piece to unfold a single aggregate by 1911, why would he later inscribe in the summer of 1914, the same summer he cites the perplexing bowing instruction in his letter, the unambiguous words “definitive version” on the original biaggregational manuscript—three years after it was already obsolete?47

"Act of God"

The annals record how an obscure disciple of the Black Hand revised history by gunning down the Archduke in front of Schiller’s Store during the dog days of 1914. No other murder in modern times has had such momentous political consequences. But the assassin’s bullet reverberated across the musical stage as well. By postponing publication of op. 7 no. 3 for nearly a decade, Princip’s twist of fate at Sarajevo unwittingly entombed not only the Archduke, but this tiny piece’s perplexing role in the grand history of modern music, and to that extent Webern’s, to remain perhaps as enigmatic as the music itself. For surely without this bizarre “Act of God,” it would have been published that “glorious summer” of 1914—whether it ended definitively upon the twelfth note, as the composer later reminisced—or not.


2. Hans and Rosaleen Moldenhauer, Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work (New York: Knopf, 1979), 194, 309-10 (“[Schoenberg’s] music had foreshadowed the principles of that [twelve-tone] system from 1914 on, but Webern’s string quartet pieces were probing that direction even earlier. Webern himself referred to these experiments long afterwards, in a lecture on 12 February 1932... Ever since the days of the breakthrough to atonality, Webern had been in the forefront of the revolutionary development, sometimes spearheading its harmonic and structural innovations. For more than a decade he had consciously experimented with twelve-tone fields himself, as in the Bagatelles, op. 9”); Walter Kolneder, Anton Webern: An Introduction to His Works, transl. Humphrey Searle (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 71 (“it is clear from [Webern’s 1932] lectures that the very advanced twelve-note writing in op. 9 did not come by chance”); Jonathan Dunsby and Arnold Whittall, Music Analysis in Theory and Practice (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 186 (“As [Webern’s] op. 7 no. 3...suggests, ‘twelve-note consciousness’ was undoubtedly present some years before the twelve-note method itself emerged in the early 1920s”).


4. Shreffler, “Vocal Origins,” 282 (“Whereas [Webern’s] statement has been interpreted as suggesting that Webern anticipated Schoenberg’s discovery, it reads much more like a rationalization after the fact”).


6. Moldenhauer, Webern, 188 (“Emil Hertzka, the director of Universal Edition...virtually promised publication of several of [Webern’s] compositions [including op. 7]...Hertzka qualified his assurances with the customary condition that nothing unforeseen should intervene”).

7. The concept of contractual suspension on the basis of unforeseeable supervening events constituting an “Act of God” is commonplace to legal jurisdictions around the world. The principle originated in the Roman civil law of obligations as codified by the Digest of Justinian from 529 to 534 A.D., and became incorporated into Austro-German jurisprudence through the promulgation of the Austrian Civil Code (ABGB) in 1811 and the German Civil Code (BGB) in 1896. See René David and John E.C. Brierley, Major Legal Systems in the World
AGGREGATION, ASSASSINATION, AND AN “ACT OF GOD”


11. The historical causes of World War I are naturally far more complex than represented here, yet it is generally accepted that the outbreak of hostilities was precipitated by the Archduke’s assassination at Sarajevo. H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Books, 1949), 1082.

12. Webern compressed three measures, mm. 4-6, of the original into two measures, mm. 4-5, of the revision.

13. I happened to come across the earlier version of op. 7 no. 3 during a brief three-hour sojourn at the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel, Switzerland in May 1994. Felix Meyer, curator of the Webern archives, and the entire Sacher staff graciously assisted my modest research. The transcription of the manuscript is my own. This study of Webern’s revisions itself has undergone several revisions. Its original version was presented before several regional music theory conferences during the spring of 1995. A revision incorporating previously unpublished musicological findings by Anne Shreffler and Felix Meyer concerning chronology was presented at the joint national meeting of the American Musicological Society and Society for Music Theory in New York City that fall. Further revisions of an analytic nature are incorporated here. I am honored to have received the New York State Music Theory Society’s 1995 Young Scholar Award entitling this publication, and thankful for Philip Lambert’s editorial assistance. Joseph Straus helped me arrange the Sacher visit, and provided invaluable guidance and feedback along the way. The examples were prepared by Anthony and Maria Cornicello. I am grateful to Anne Shreffler, whose name and work figure prominently throughout these notes, for her gracious however divergent input, and beyond that for her outstanding Webern scholarship.

14. Webern composed op. 7 no. 3 in June 1910. The “original version” cited here, dating from its premier in April 1911, was preceded briefly by a slightly earlier but substantially similar one distinguished only by a minute variation in the initial violin quintuplet in m. 4. Webern replaced the figure immediately after its first performance, giving rise to the “original version” cited here. See Felix Meyer and Anne Shreffler, “Performance and Revision: The Early History of Webern’s Four Pieces for Violin and Piano, op. 7,” in *Webern Studies*, ed. Kathryn Bailey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 135-69, discussing this and other revisions to op. 7 generally over a period of several years. See also Allen Forte, “A Major Webern Revision and Its Implications for Analysis,” *Perspectives of New Music* 28/1 (1990): 224-52, addressing alterations in op. 7 no. 2.


16. David Lewin’s brilliant demonstration of how different musical puzzles often require different kinds of solutions in *Musical Form and Transformation: 4 Analytic Essays* (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 1993), encouraged me to develop the Aggregate Background Structure as a new analytic model for understanding the revision in op. 7 no. 3.


18. There appear to be no detailed studies of linearly ordered aggregate formation in atonal music. Dunsky and Whittall, *Music Analysis*, 129, 176, explores unordered aggregation or “the accumulation of twelve-note collections, which saturate the texture atonally without requiring any of the systematic orderings of twelve-note music proper” in the atonal literature, including op. 7 no. 3. Although these authors suggest the possibility of linearization, they seem to disorder the aggregate in op. 7 no. 3, and conclude without analysis that “the gradual unfolding of the twelve-note collection [does] not appear to obey a single, consistent structuring principle when considered...in pitch-class terms.” Shaugn O’Donnell and Henry Burnett,”Linear Ordering of the Chromatic Aggregate in Classical Symphonic Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 18/1 (1996): 22-50 staked out ordered aggregation in the tonal context of late eighteenth-century music, noting that “chromaticism—in particular, the completion of the chromatic aggregate—is endemic in all but the simplest of tonal pieces. The question is not if the aggregate will be completed—that is virtually a given—but rather how the aggregate is ordered and partitioned as a future source of development” (23). The useful term “pitch-class counterpoint,” as a model for pitch-class succession, is borrowed from William Benjamin, “Pitch-Class Counterpoint in Tonal Music,” in *Music Theory: Special Topics*, ed. Richmond Browne (New York: Academic Press, 1981), 1-32, and developed in Joseph N. Straus, *The Music of Ruth Crawford Seeger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 100-102.

19. Dunsky and Whittall, *Music Analysis*, 176 (“the twelfth note, G, may have been ‘saved up’ by Webern for the final chord”).

20. Meyer and Shreffler, “Performance and Revision,” 160, points out that the twelfth note completing the first aggregate in the original version, the F♯ at the end of m. 7 (corresponding to m. 6 of the revision), also marks the exact midpoint of the piece, falling within the twentieth quarter-note beat out of the total of forty-five. Webern’s revision compressing three measures of the original into two in the first half of the piece reduced the total duration to forty-two beats, and pushed the midpoint forward to fall after the first beat in the following measure. Meyer and Shreffler astutely note that Webern’s subtle shift of the dynamic climax of the central crescendo-diminuendo from the end of m. 7 in the original to the beginning of the next measure in the revision coincides with the concomitant displacement of the aggregational midpoint.

21. The unrelated tetrachordal partitions of the original ABS form set classes 4–5 (0126), 4–14 (0237), and 4–4 (0125) in the first aggregate, and 4–27 (0258), 4–27 (0258), 4–28 (0369) in the second aggregate. Its unrelated hexachordal partitions pair set classes 6–Z12 (012467) with 6–Z41 (012368) in the first aggregate, and 6–Z49 (013479) with 6–Z28 (013569) in the second aggregate.


23. The 3–1s are also of course equivalent via transposition.

24. Kathryn Bailey, *The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13-29, emphasizes the centrality of trichordal derivation and symmetrical construction throughout Webern’s serial works. This procedure for generating an internally unified, ordered aggregate, already nascent in the ABS of op. 7 no. 3, reaches its apotheosis sev-
eral years later in the Concerto op. 24, whose famous symmetrical row is derived from sequential P, I, R, and RI transformations of a single (014) trichord.


In either case, this alternative row also bears a striking, albeit different, resemblance to the ABS of op. 7 no. 3. Whereas the first version preserves trichordal invariance as indicated in the text, the second version preserves hexachordal invariance. The hexachordal partition of op. 7 no. 3’s ABS pairs set classes 6–Z6 and 6–Z38. The hexachordal partition of this alternative row of op. 17 no. 1 simply reverses the order of this same hexachordal pair, yielding 6–Z38 and 6–Z6. The two structures are thus equivalent hexachordal transformations of each other, generated simply by reversing the position of the same identical hexachords. Moreover, if this alternative version of op. 17 no. 1’s row is transposed to begin on the same transpositional level as the ABS of op. 7 no. 3, yielding 983412–657TE0, their corresponding hexachords share two invariant 5–7 pentachords, [89123] and [567E0], with only a single interchange of pitch classes accounting for their difference. Both contested versions of the row in op. 17 no. 1, therefore, share remarkable invariant affinities with the ordered ABS of op. 7 no. 3.

26. Bailey calls this vertical disposition of the aggregate across multiple voices “block topography,” as opposed to “linear topography” presenting the aggregate horizontally within a single voice. Webern subsequently employed the same vertical or block topography characterizing the ABS in op. 7 no. 3’s in the majority of his early serial works, including op. 17, op. 18 no. 1 and 2, op. 23, op. 24 no. 2 and 3, op. 25, and op. 27 no. 3, and combined it with the linear approach in op. 19, op. 20, op. 22 no. 2, and op. 24 no. 1. Bailey, *Twelve-Note Music*, 31-33. Shreffler argues that “both modes of Webern’s serial discourse were present at the very beginning” (“Vocal Origins,” 309-13).

27. According to Shreffler, “Webern placed great faith in the power of the twelve-tone row to provide a subconscious order.... In freeing the twelve-tone row from the musical surface, Webern granted it a metaphysical significance that far surpassed any structural role.” Shreffler, “Vocal Origins,” 319. Webern later articulated this deep conviction, already manifested nascently in ABS of op. 7 no. 3, by stating: “The twelve-note row is, as a rule, not a ‘theme.’ But I can work without thematicism, that’s to say much more freely, because of the unity that’s now been achieved in another way; the row ensures unity.” Webern, *Path to New Music*, 55. Milton Babbitt’s music is predicated upon a similar embedded orientation toward the row’s “ordering as a referential source far deeper than that which appears on the immediate surface...the notion [is] that of a structural influence, far more than explicit statement.” Milton Babbitt, *Words about Music*, ed. Stephen Dembski and Joseph N. Straus (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 26-29.

28. This transformational analysis invokes the theoretical framework developed by David Lewin in *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* and *Musical Form and Transformation*.

30. The issue of whether, or to what extent, twelve-tone thinking in atonal music foreshadows serial practices is complex and controversial. On one hand, Dunsby and Whittall argue unequivocally that “the early atonal repertory foreshadows twelve-note serialism by consistently accumulating twelve-note collections.” Dunsby and Whittall, *Music Analysis*, 176. Likewise, Carl Dahlhaus urges that “historians investigating the prehistory of dodecaphony should not only search for substantial preconditions—for twelve-note complexes or permutations of interval structures—but should also reconstruct the problems as the solution to which...dodecaphony acquired a significance.” Carl Dahlhaus, *Schoenberg and the New Music*, transl. Derrick Puffett and Alfred Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 90. Articulating this perspective from a broader point of view, Edward Lowinsky metaphorically objected to the “fashion in our treatment of the history of music that one might call...the theory of Immaculate Conception.” Edward E. Lowinsky, “Secret Chromatic Art Re-examined,” in *Perspectives in Musicology*, ed. Barry S. Brook, et al. (New York: Pendragon, 1985), 91-135, 117.


This ahistorical conception of history is summarized by Leo Treitler’s reminder of Goethe’s warning: “Too much inquiring after the sources of things is dangerous. We should rather concentrate on phenomena as given realities.” Leo Treitler, *Music and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 90. Indeed, the entire teleological, positivist conception of music history as a progressive, causally-related, goal-directed Lamarckian parade into the future has come under post-modern attack. Treitler, however, astutely draws the critical distinction between causality and chronology: “In music history we often explain one work or style by reference to another, antecedent work or style. This establishing of the relationship of antecedence is a necessary and illuminating part of history writing, but as a causal explanation it can, in most cases, hope to rely only on the thin past of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*” [inferring causality solely on the basis of temporal succession]. Treitler, *Historical Imagination*, 82.

Rejecting causality does not necessitate ahistoricism or a denial of history itself. Historical connections and associations can be drawn between different musical periods, styles, and works on the basis of temporality without teleology. These phenomena by necessity exist in time, and therefore precede and succeed one another in a purely temporal or sequential sense, even though their relationship may not be, or even asserted to be, causal or inevitable. Invoking this important distinction, one may safely make the factual assertion that the ordered aggregate in the atonal background of op. 7 no. 3 temporally preceded, and for that reason alone, historically antedated or anticipated in time the explicitly ordered aggregates of serialism without arguing, and therefore having to defend, a causal relationship between the two phenomena. It ought to be noted finally in this Webernian context that the titles of the composer’s two lectures cycles, “The Path to the New Music” and “The Path to
Twelve-Note Composition” (the latter chosen at Schoenberg’s suggestion), are a strong indication that, rightly or wrongly, Webern himself located his earlier atonal works, such as op. 7 no. 3, on a continuous path leading up to and connecting with his later serial endeavors.

31. Because of the extreme miniaturization of Webern’s work generally, and of op. 7 no. 3 in particular, “a minimal change at the surface level of the music [may entail] a pronounced change in the underlying structure.” Forte, Structure of Atonal Music, 128.

32. Both the hydra and Darwin metaphors are Morton Feldman’s—evocative images he used in describing his own music following a performance of his first String Quartet on 4 May 1980 in New York. They seem equally applicable here. Feldman once remarked that he sought to enter Webern’s delicate world of sound, but leave Webern’s intellectual baggage behind.

33. In his own archival study of op. 7 revisions, Forte concludes that “from the [“definitive version Summer 1914”] annotation on the cover of the manuscript [of the original version], we may infer that Webern made one series of corrections in the summer of 1914, and that later, perhaps after the war, he made additional changes which resulted in the published version we now know.” Forte, “A Major Webern Revision,” 225.

34. Shreffler, “Vocal Origins,” 278-98 (“Absorbing the new ideas, which Webern learned about in the summer of 1922 or earlier, required a major rethinking.... [Schoenberg’s disclosure] might have taken place as early as 1921.... That Webern could even attempt relatively sophisticated row technique in the summer of 1922 is explicable only through contact with Schoenberg, which has now been established.... [T]he sketch for ‘Mein Weg’ resembles...Schoenberg’s sketches for the Präludium (later op. 25 no. 1), which Schoenberg had completed the previous summer.... Schoenberg’s influence...is apparent on every page of the sketches for op. 15 no. 4”).


36. Webern made comparable post-war revisions to pre-war versions of other pieces in the early 1920s, such as op. 10 no. 4 and op. 13 no. 4, in each case generating two different versions of the same work. See Felix Meyer and Anne C. Shreffler, “Webern’s Revisions: Some Analytic Implications,” Music Analysis 12/3 (1993): 355-79.

37. The notion that a composer may seek to “remake the past” under an “anxiety of influence” is persuasively argued and supported by Joseph N. Straus, extrapolating upon the literary theories of Harold Bloom, in Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). Although Webern outwardly acknowledged Schoenberg’s priority, his psychological anxiety and emotional turmoil engendered by his close relationship to Schoenberg as an imposing father figure is reflected in Shreffler’s observation that “Webern’s assimilation of the twelve-tone technique was complicated by the conflict between two desires: to win Schoenberg’s approval and to remain independent. That Schoenberg was the most important person in Webern’s life for over twenty-five years there can be no doubt.” Shreffler, “Vocal Origins,” 281. Therein lies a potential motive for Webern’s retroactive revision of op. 7 no. 3 in this case. Shreffler’s fleeting implication of the absence of a motive for such conduct does not consider the Straus-Bloom theory. Shreffler, Lyric Impulse, 50, n. 30.

38. This controversial hypothesis—which Benjamin Boretz in private conversation felicitously dubbed the “smoking aggregate” theory—is admittedly speculative, though not cavalier. Although Shreffler finds “no evidence that Webern ever altered dates in order to establish himself as the inventor of the method,” Shreffler, Lyric Impulse, 50, n. 30, whether Webern might have sought even unconsciously to achieve this same purpose by revising an early score is a different allegation—albeit one far more difficult either to prove or refute. Defending his controversial theory of a “secret chromatic art” in the Netherlands motet of the mid-sixteenth century, Edward Lowinsky has eloquently justified this responsible yet hypothetical approach to music history: “If we compare the prevailing working methods of musicologists with those of scientists, physicists in particular, we come to the surprising conclusion that it is the humanistic discipline that resists, indeed suspects, the use of hypothesis and theory, and
that it is science today which celebrates the triumph of theory and hypothesis.... Caution and factuality are scholarly virtues, but without imagination they are like wingless birds.... A factual approach to history isolates the events; hypothesis connects them. The factual approach leaves the events inanimate; hypothesis breathes life into them. To record facts takes precision; to formulate an hypothesis calls for imagination.... The factual approach is favored by those who seek certainty above all, who believe certainty to be the very purpose of scholarship. The hypothetical approach is favored by those who seek meaning above all, who know how to live with uncertainty as a price to be paid for deeper understanding.” Lowinsky, “Secret Chromatic Art Re-examined,” 94-95.

39. Meyer and Shreffler discovered this new chronological evidence and discuss it in detail in “Performance and Revision.”


41. These additional archival clues unearthed by Meyer and Shreffler suggesting a pre-war revision of op. 7 no. 3 include: (1) a violin part for another piece in the revised manuscript, op. 7 no. 1, seemingly predating an earlier version published in Der Ruf, an avant-garde Viennese magazine, in March 1912. (2) Webern’s use of the pre-war appellation “von” and a pre-war opus number, op. 6 no. 1, on the revision, and (3) performer’s handwritten annotations on certain parts suggestively linking the revision to its second performance in June 1912. On the basis of this and other evidence, these authors conclusively date the revision of op. 7 no. 3 to some time between its premier in April 1911 and the Der Ruf publication of op. 7 no. 1 in March 1912, notwithstanding Webern’s “definitive version Summer 1914” inscription on the original manuscript. Meyer and Shreffler, “Performance and Revision.”

42. Posing and answering her own query, “Can we trust Webern’s dates?,” Shreffler contends: “We know that Webern was neat and orderly in his personal life almost to the point of obsession. A man who would keep track of every event in his and his family’s lives, make long lists of equipment for a mountain-climbing trip, and copy out railway timetables, can be relied upon, I believe, to remember accurately when he composed what pieces.” Shreffler, Lyric Impulse, 49-50.

43. Haimo, Schoenberg’s Serial Odyssey, 42.

44. Shreffler, “Vocal Origins,” 282. Shreffler speculates whether Webern might have been recalling this early Kunffttag fragment when he mistakenly cited the Bagatelles in his 1932 lecture, but she questions its independence of conception. Citing Haimo’s studies of Schoenberg’s chromatic experimentation, Shreffler concedes that “Webern’s self-conscious effort to include all twelve tones in ‘Kunffttag III’ could well have been inspired by conversations with Schoenberg.” Rather than the obscure Kunffttag fragment, however, it would seem more likely that Webern may have been recalling a 1911 uniaggregational revision of op. 7 no. 3, in the same year he recalled experiencing his uniaggregational “feeling.”

45. Arnold Schoenberg, Theory of Harmony, transl. Roy E. Carter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 407-08, 419, citing Webern’s op. 5 no. 1, m. 5. Unordered aggregation occurs throughout atonal music, and the earliest instance is difficult to pin down. In addition to those cited in the text, the third of Berg’s Altenberg Lieder (1912) is loosely based on a single twelve-note chord. Shreffler, “Vocal Origins,” 284. Gustav Mahler, however, to whom Schoenberg dedicated his harmony treatise, used a twelve-note chord in 1910 in his Tenth Symphony (m. 194). Chromatic circulation has also had a long and colorful history predating the atonal period. James M. Baker locates several instances of systematic aggregate completion by Mozart in “Chromaticism in Classic Music,” Music Theory and the Exploration of the Past, ed. Christopher Hatch and David W. Bernstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 233-307. Schoenberg located all twelve tones in the dux of Bach’s B minor fugue in the first book of the Well-Tempered Clavier (Style and Idea, 393), while Webern found “a world in which the twelve notes hold sway” in Bach’s chorale Christ lag in Todesbanden
(Path to New Music, 29). Long before that, Gesualdo’s madrigal *Io pur respiro* ticks off all twelve notes within a span of only three measures as early as 1611.


47. As in most unsolved mysteries, the clues in this case point in different directions. In their defense of a pre-1914 revision based upon the Hartmann letter and other circumstantial evidence cited in note 41, Meyer and Shreffler still have to climb a steep hill to explain Webern’s “definitive version Summer 1914” inscription on the original version, which they concede to be powerful evidence of a post-war revision: “Our decision to place [the revision] in 1912 or before might seem...controversial. The fact that the title page of the first fair copy [of op. 7] bears the remark (in Webern’s hand) ‘endgültige Fassung Sommer 1914’ would seem to indicate that its top layer and all subsequent manuscripts date from after that time. Moreover, in other cases, we know that Webern revised his early works for the most part in the early 1920s, as he was preparing them for publication.... [W]e too began with the assumption that Webern must have revised op. 7 most substantially after 1918....” Meyer and Shreffler, “Performance and Revision,” 146.

Meyer and Shreffler’s most recent musicological discoveries, however, appear to contradict this obvious conclusion. To defuse that inconsistency, they are relegated to speculate, contrary to their own prior intuitions and common sense, that it was not the original version bearing the inscription, but rather the revised version that Webern actually considered definitive: “The ‘endgültige Fassung’ of summer 1914 to which Webern referred on the title page of [the original version], then concerns [the] revised version.... He would have written the note as a reminder to himself that there was now a better version, which in effect invalidated the first manuscript” (Meyer and Shreffler, “Performance and Revision,” 150, emphasis added).

This is a hard pill to swallow. It is unconvincing and counterintuitive that Webern, or anyone else for that matter, would write “definitive” on something that was superseded three years earlier to remind himself that it was not definitive. It is equally implausible that this obsessively meticulous composer who, according to Shreffler herself, would “copy out railway timetables” and whose dates “can be relied upon,” would confuse his scores dates, or even carelessly risk such confusion by others in this manner. See note 42, supra. Webern’s inscription on the original version in 1914 cannot be so readily dismissed. From a strictly evidentiary point of view, the inscription “definitive version Summer 1914” clearly “speaks for itself”—and what it unmistakably says, loud and clear, is that the version upon which it is written, and not some other version, is the definitive and authoritative one as of that date. An inscription upon a document such as this is always presumed to refer to that document, not an extraneous one. Meyer and Shreffler’s end run to create order out of confusion by spuriously interpreting this inscription to mean precisely the opposite of what it plainly states—i.e., “definitive” means “invalid”—forces a round peg into a square hole just to make the puzzle fit. Their fanciful construction of ordinary language in the absence of ambiguity impermissibly reads too much into the clear and obvious sense of these words. It is therefore objectionable on the grounds that it violates the well-established “plain meaning” doctrine in the parole evidence rule of documentary construction, and accordingly is inadmissible under the rules of evidence. 9 Wigmore on Evidence, §§ 2460-63, 2470 (Boston: Little Brown, Chadbourn rev. 1981); McCormick on Evidence, 4th ed. (St. Paul: West, 1992).

Moreover, if “what’s good for the goose is good for the gander,” can’t the Hartmann letter also be explained away through similar speculation? Perhaps the *weich gezogen* “gently drawn” qualification to the *col legno* passage only referred to Webern’s unnotated performance preference rather than a written instruction in the original score. Webern might have reasonably pointed this out to the violinist in 1914 precisely because it did not appear in the original yet still current version of the piece. The existence of this bowing qualification can
alone be inferred without necessarily inferring the existence of the entire revised score itself, which may have only subsequently incorporated the previously unwritten instruction after the war.

But how else might this mystery be solved to preserve a pre-war revision of op. 7 no. 3 in accordance with the impressive evidence supporting it? Did the disruptive “definitive” inscription on the title page of the original version only refer to part of op. 7, but for some unknown reason exclude the third piece? There is no evidence to support this unwarranted loophole, which again runs up against the rules of evidence, and Meyer and Shreffler carve none out. Or did Webern first revise the piece in 1911, but then change his mind back again to the original in 1914, only to decide later upon the revision after all in 1922? The 1914 inscription on the older version would then at least make some sense, by clarifying that it had been resuscitated once again to become “definitive” three years later, despite the more recent and therefore seemingly authoritative revision. Still....