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Cavell's Odd Couple: Schoenberg and Wittgenstein

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STANLEY CAVELL'S LECTURE, "PHILOSOPHY AND THE UNHEARD," which he gave in 1999 at a Harvard conference on Arnold Schoenberg's chamber music in honor of his long-time friend music theorist, David Lewin, was an occasion for him to dwell in a philosophical site structured as a set of mutually reflecting panels.[1] In that lecture, Cavell revisited his younger self as a music student at the University of California, Berkeley, studying the great scores together with Lewin, tracking the work that art does, savoring the rigor and the beauty one looks and listens for, as he pondered quite candidly the scarcity of his own writings about music as a philosopher over the ensuing decades. In this lecture, reflections and refractions abound as Cavell attempts to come to terms with this omission, so very personal to him, but also with a possibility for a new philosophy which would be responsive to the reciprocities of music and language. The young and the older Cavell, the aspirations of music and the vagaries of philosophy, and at the center of it all: Schoenberg and Wittgenstein set to reflect one another at the chasm of modernity, whose topography is the subject matter of so much of Cavell's philosophical writing.

The usual problem with coupling Wittgenstein and Schoenberg is that it involves not only patent suppression of Wittgenstein's well-documented, and, I contend, also well-grounded, reasons for rejecting modern music as a major premise in the attempt to adduce a proper Wittgensteinian response to Schoenberg's notion of twelve-tone composition, but also some measure of patronizing, which is manifest in the very thought that there must have been some intellectual failure on Wittgenstein's part for not developing a taste for the avant-garde worthy of his advanced, revolutionary philosophical ideas. Such opinions are quite typical

among writers on the topic: before Cavell's lecture, which was originally published in 2000 by Harvard University Department of Music as an epilogue to a collection of papers from the 1999 conference), and after, by those who also opt to mask these fallacies with a veritable splurge of superficial affinities between Wittgenstein and Schoenberg. However, Cavell is quite different in this respect.

The centerpiece of Cavell's lecture is not a run-of-the-mill smear of bold brush strokes, which, more often than not, yield very little further understanding of either Schoenberg or Wittgenstein, but rather a highly specific analogy between Schoenberg's idea of the twelve-tone row and Wittgenstein's idea of grammar, which is supposed to encapsulate an expansive, sweeping philosophical program—Cavell's own. Cavell takes his cue from David Lewin's contention that Schoenberg's twelve-tone row is not a concrete and specific musical subject or object to be presented once and for all as referential in sound and in time. Rather, the row is an abstraction that manifests itself everywhere in the musical work. For Cavell, this suggests the idea of representing and communicating the omnipresent *unrepresentable* in all its manifold potentialities. As such, the twelve-tone row enables Cavell to articulate a thoughtful upshot:

> My suggestion is that the Schoenbergian idea of the row with its unforeseen yet pervasive consequences is a serviceable image of the Wittgensteinian idea of grammar and its elaboration of criteria of judgment, which shadow our expressions and which reveal pervasive yet unforeseen conditions of our existence, specifically in its illumination of our finite standing as one in which there is no complete vision of the possibilities of our understanding—no total revelation as it were—but in which the assumption of each of our assertions

> and retractions, in its specific manifestations in time and place, is to be worked through, discovering, so to speak, for each case its unconscious row.[2]

It's important to underscore here a trivial fact, which I've pointed out elsewhere.[3] Coupling Wittgenstein and Schoenberg rests in a convenient contextual limbo, underplaying a total absence of evidence—of any kind, of any direct influence—of interaction or mutual interest between the two men. There is absolutely no reference to Arnold Schoenberg in Wittgenstein's entire *Nachlass*, in his lectures, or in any of his known correspondences. Similarly, and perhaps less surprisingly, there is absolutely no reference to Ludwig Wittgenstein in Schoenberg's entire literary estate. This historical impasse means that external philosophical grounding and impetus are called for here. Indeed, this textual impasse clearly sets Cavell apart.

The allegory of Wittgenstein's philosophical deed in his *Philosophical Investigations* through Schoenbergian practice is designed to be illuminating enough to encourage one "to reflect further on why […] the philosophical subject of the *Investigations*, the modern ego entangled in its expressions of desire (Wittgenstein speaks both of our urge to understand as well as of our equally pressing urge to misunderstand), is specifically characterized by Wittgenstein in its moments of torment, sickness, strangeness, self-destructiveness, perversity, suffocation, and lostness."[4] Cavell contends that it is in the paths and grounding of Wittgenstein's *Investigations* that we can learn a new responsibility with such concepts. Be that as it may, even within the realm of an allegory, Wittgenstein and Schoenberg remain an odd couple. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall focus on the following two main issues concerning the oddity of this coupling.

First, it behooves us to inquire about Cavell's self-conscious suppression of Wittgenstein's explicit rejection of the language of modern music, which Wittgenstein

himself attested that he did not understand.[5] Importantly, Wittgenstein's attitude toward modern music was actually more nuanced than it may seem at first glance, so the task of approximating a "Wittgensteinian response," as Cavell puts it, to the work of Schoenberg requires an attention to detail that Cavell does not provide. It remains an open question, indeed crucial here, how to delineate the analogy between Schoenberg and Wittgenstein. I argue that, at least from Wittgenstein's perspective, Cavell tipped the analogy beyond the point of a textually grounded delineation.

Second, the focal point of Cavell's allegory remains opaque. Clearly, Lewin's suggestion propels Cavell to couple Schoenberg and Wittgenstein in a certain way. For Cavell, it is as if music theory teaches philosophy, as if a philosophical deed is bound to harness the intricacies of a musical procedure. Yet the question remains whether the "Schoenbergian unheard" is well-suited for its purported Wittgensteinian counterpart. Cavell's allegory has both a music-theoretical facet and a philosophical facet that seem to require better calibration, since, as I contend, Schoenberg and Wittgenstein differ here profoundly. Ultimately, in this "tale of two unheards," Cavell invariably remains on the side of Wittgenstein.

Let us begin the discussion with the question concerning the relevance of Wittgenstein's attitude toward modern music. Cavell's justification for suppressing Wittgenstein's rejection of modern music in coupling Wittgenstein with Schoenberg is found not in "Philosophy and the Unheard," but rather in his much earlier response to Georg Henrik von Wright's view on Wittgenstein in relation to his times.[6] The matter at hand was the nature and the philosophical import of Wittgenstein's sympathetic outlook on Oswald Spengler's ideas in *The Decline of the West*. Wittgenstein read Spengler's *magnum opus* during the Spring of 1930, commenting at the time that "much, perhaps most of it, is completely in touch with what I have often thought myself."[7] Spengler's ideas about the

morphological study of cultures propelled (albeit by way of criticism) Wittgenstein's growing fascination with the possibility of philosophizing by means of making illuminating comparisons, and as Wittgenstein's lectures in Cambridge in the 1930s make evident, this exerted a particular influence on his conception of aesthetics.

The crux of the debate between Cavell and Von Wright concerned Wittgenstein's understanding of cultural decline, *pace* Spengler. Cavell and Von Wright agree that Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy is intimately allied to a way of viewing contemporary civilization; they also agree that this intimate connection is shown in the way in which *Philosophical Investigations* expresses a sense of its own time and that this is connected to Wittgenstein's reading of Spengler. According to Von Wright:

> Wittgenstein […] thought that the problems with which he was struggling were somehow connected with "the way people live," that is, with features of our culture or civilization to which he and his pupils belonged. […] His way of doing philosophy was not an attempt to tell us what philosophy, once and for all, *is* but expressed what for him, in the setting of the times, it had to be.[8]

Cavell concurred, describing the *Investigations* as "a depiction of our own times" and attributing to it "a Spenglerian valence."[9] Cavell writes: "what Wittgenstein means by speaking outside language games […] is a kind of interpretation of, or a homologous form of, what Spengler means in picturing the decline of culture as a process of externalization."[10] Rendering cultural decline in terms of a loss of orientation and a loss of home, Cavell later underlines, in "Philosophy and the Unheard," Wittgenstein's allegiance to Spengler by saying (as cited earlier) that "the philosophical subject of the *Investigations*, the modern ego entangled in its expressions of desire […] is specifically characterized by Wittgenstein in its

moments of torment, sickness, strangeness, self-destructiveness, perversity, suffocation, and lostness."[11] In the passage to the time of civilization (as opposed to culture), we lose a community, an inheritance, a shared sense of life, and natural (as opposed to artificial) forms of interaction and expression.

However, Cavell sharply disagreed with Von Wright about the character of Wittgenstein's emulation of Spengler's point of view on cultural decline, especially pertaining to the nature of Wittgenstein's philosophical project (according to Cavell). Whereas Von Wright opted to view cultural decline in terms of an abnormal cancerous condition that has invaded our ways of life , Cavell rejected this image of a cultural malignancy, underscoring the stubborn normalcy or everydayness of cultural decline, noting that "Spengler's 'decline' is about the normal, say the internal, death and life of cultures.[12] Cavell's point is that:

> Wittgenstein in the *Investigations* diurnalizes Spengler's vision of the destiny toward exhausted forms, toward nomadism, toward the loss of culture, or say of home, or say community; he depicts our everyday encounters with philosophy, […] wherein the ancient task of philosophy, to awaken us, or say bring us to our senses, takes the form of returning us to the everyday, the ordinary, every day, diurnally.[13]

Cavell offers here an intriguing portrayal of Wittgenstein as a reluctant modernist—intellectually receptive to, and at times even deeply appreciative of, the various cultural manifestations of his time, yet never at peace with any of them; highly proficient and fully immersed in philosophical dialogue, yet never at home in what he perceived as its profound misuses of language. For one can never be at home when home is lost. Such intellectual

meanderings bespeak the deepening of a sense of pervasive cultural critique, which Wittgenstein decidedly carried over, early on, from Karl Kraus to what later emerged as his mode of philosophizing in the *Investigations*. Forever stranded within language he kept running against the invisible walls of his cage, drawing back with a bloody head only to go on—every day, diurnally. Cavell's unique take on Wittgenstein's diurnalized Spenglerian mode of philosophizing in the time of one's own civilization makes Cavell's suppression of Wittgenstein's dislike and rejection of the language of modern music (for the purpose of coupling Wittgenstein with Schoenberg) more compelling, in a sense even logical despite its apparent paradoxicality: Wittgenstein's rejection is an embrace—this is his philosophical revolt against cultural decline.

Yet for this arrangement to make sense, Cavell needs to render Schoenberg's method for composing with twelve tones as a "natural" phenomenon in the annals of modern music, that is, as part and parcel of the normal, internal death of "high culture" music in the West. Importantly, what Cavell requires (and assumes without argument) is a historical-musicological sense in which Schoenberg's twelve-tone music could be considered as an epitome of a music appropriate to the time of civilization (namely, modernity in the West), merely reflecting the fatality inherent in a seamless exhaustion of forms, in Spengler's sense; or, in Wittgenstein's framework, speaking outside of language games. It is here, I contend, that Cavell unwittingly parts ways with Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein's taste in music was powered also by his philosophical reasoning, which was organic to his philosophical development, and his philosophical attitude toward modern music ultimately manifested a deeply felt gradation. In such ranking, there is a figure who supplies a direct link between Spengler's outlook on cultural decline and Wittgenstein's attitude toward modern music, namely, Austrian music theorist and critic, Heinrich Schenker, with whose work Wittgenstein was acquainted. Wittgenstein's exposure to Schenker's ideas

was facilitated by conversations in the early 1930s with his nephew, the musicologist Felix Salzer, while the latter was studying with Schenker in Vienna.[14] Schenker's philosophical outlook on cultural decline, as well as his theoretic diagnosis of the ensuing disintegration of musical sensitivities and creativity, closely aligned with Spengler's view in various ways.[15] It is reasonable to assume that Cavell was unaware of this connection at the time of writing "Philosophy and the Unheard."

On this Spengler-Schenker axis we encounter one of Wittgenstein's most unique passages concerning what he deemed to be different kinds of absurd in modern music.[16] An important observation in this passage concerns the characterization of our experience of the disintegration of cultural cohesion in terms of a constraint—understood as an inability to conceptualize the transition to the modern. Wittgenstein's point is that there is something, for sure, to be grasped and expressed amid cultural decline, but we are not astute enough to conceptualize it. The kind of cleverness which, according to Wittgenstein, we seem to lack, is not a matter of mental capacity but rather a matter of education and tradition: we are missing an acquired ability to comprehend cultural codes. We have become constrained by the incommensurability between us and the past and so we run up against a paradox: even if we knew "the truth," says Wittgenstein, we probably wouldn't be able to comprehend it. This problematizes the very idea of music appropriate to the time of civilization.

Such observations rise to a distinction that Wittgenstein maintained between two kinds of absurdities in modern music. There is music that reflects a constraint on seeing *that* we do not comprehend and there is another sort of music that reflects a constraint on seeing *what* we do not comprehend—on seeing through. The first sort of modern music corresponds to the various nonsensical maxims which derive from the purported forms of progress. For Wittgenstein, such music is absurd in a superficially attractive sense and for that reason, he concludes, it is rubbish. The other kind of modern music consists in denouncing such

nonsensical maxims and formulations, but it ends up being vacuous or vacant [*nichtssagend*]—absurd, to be sure, but this time because it can't pass *as* absurd in the other, "dressed-up" sense, which for all its faults, enjoys some sort of social recognition. Such vacuous modern music bespeaks our short-sightedness; it gropes for something which it cannot express.

Wittgenstein's distinction between nonsensical modern music and vacuous modern music corresponds to the distinction made by Schenker (and also by Spengler) between progressive romantics, on the one hand, and classicist epigones, on the other. According to Schenker, the artificial noisiness that characterizes the music of progressive romantic composers (Richard Strauss, in particular) is symptomatic of their inability to bind their empty sonorities together as elaborations of a single chord. Hence, Schenker maintained, they try to mask the primitive design of their music with heavy orchestration, with noise and polyphonic clatter, and also they often resort to vulgar, extra-musical narratives in order to solve problems of musical continuity.

Meanwhile, contemporary classicist epigones relay on a reproductive reworking of old forms: they quite simply come up with worn-out imitations of the music of Johannes Brahms. For Wittgenstein, "music came to a full stop with Brahms; and even in Brahms I can begin to hear the sound of machinery."[17] Wittgenstein thought that the opposition of vacuous modern composers to the predominant form of progress was commendable, but their inability to express what they themselves could no longer understand exacted a heavy social price: as modern, such music was bound to appear foolish. Composer Josef Labor, a protégé of the Wittgenstein family, and a close friend, is named as a prime example of such a lamentable outcome.

It is a striking historical-musicological fact—countering Cavell's intuition—that the Schoenberg of the twelve-tone period fits neither of these genuinely Spenglerian categories of

musical decline as upheld by Wittgenstein. (The early Schoenberg of *Verklärte Nacht* fame fits perfectly with the category of the nonsensical absurd alongside Richard Strauss.) It is an even more striking and inconvenient textual fact that Wittgenstein looked up to Gustav Mahler, despite hating his music, as the composer who could have produced music appropriate to the time of civilization, yet failed miserably. Wittgenstein said, "you would need to know a good deal about music, its history and development, to understand [Mahler]."[18]

For Wittgenstein, Mahler is a limiting case, a *sui generis* philosophical absurd.[19] Wittgenstein portrayed Mahler's musical deviancy by suggesting a metaphor:

> A picture of a complete apple tree, however accurate, is in a certain sense much less like the tree itself than is a little daisy. And in the same sense a symphony by Bruckner is infinitely closer to a symphony from the heroic period than is one by Mahler. If the latter is a work of art it is one of a *totally* different sort. (But this actually itself a Spenglerian observation.)"[20]

Mahler's music is like a *trompe l'oeil* picture: it invites us to engage in a completely different set of games of participation. Wittgenstein voices a "Spenglerian observation," as he puts it, that a Mahler symphony might be a work of art of a totally different sort, embodying an entirely different kind of spiritual enterprise for which our aesthetic measuring rods are inadequate. Thus, for Wittgenstein, it was not inconceivable that Mahler's music might belong to the kind of spiritual enterprise that embodies civilization in the modern period. Mahler ought to have been capable of ushering in a new kind of absurd: modern music that is truly appropriate for an age without culture. From Wittgenstein's perspective, this would have been the strikingly absurd possibility of an artistic afterimage of a wholesale rejection of

the internal relations that hold together musical gesture and human life. Indeed, this would have been a musical embodiment of a loss of home.

Wittgenstein's great frustration with Mahler, more specifically, was that the prodigious composer was inauthentic and not courageous enough to fulfil this mission. Not being able to distinguish the genuine from the false, Mahler was lying to himself about his own inauthenticity. It is important, particularly from a Cavellian perspective, that Wittgenstein's criticism of Mahler was also explicitly self-directed as he was trying to own a certain style of philosophizing in the time of civilization. "I am in the same danger [as Mahler]," he wrote.[21] Wittgenstein thought that one cannot see oneself from within an overview, and therefore one can always (mistakenly) render one's otherness as some sort of excellence. Ultimately, the problem afflicting Mahler as a composer, and Wittgenstein as a philosopher and writer, is a problem of incommensurability, which pertains to the cultural presuppositions for making value distinctions in the first place. "For if today's circumstances are so different, from what they once were, that you cannot compare your work with earlier works in respect of its *genre*, then you equally cannot compare its *value* with that of the other work."[22] Wittgenstein concluded on a personal note: "I myself am constantly making the mistake under discussion. Incorruptibility is everything."[23] For Wittgenstein, the question, as Yuval Lurie put it, remained "whether the spiritual progression of our culture is still continuing (and it is us who are being left behind), or whether the culture has disappeared (and we are the only ones left to notice it)."[24]

Yet we now see that Schoenberg of the twelve-tone period has no place in Wittgenstein's overall conceptual scheme of musical decline. Not only does Schoenberg not fit into Wittgenstein's distinction between the nonsensical and the vacuous absurd in modern music, but also Wittgenstein had already reserved the liminal designation of the authentic composer for the time without culture (complete with the inevitable comparison with the

possibility of genuine philosophizing) for Gustav Mahler, albeit to no avail. From Wittgenstein's perspective, there may well be something invasive, unnatural, abnormal, and uninhabitable about the case of Schoenberg in the vein of Von Wright's original suggestion.

Turning now to the second issue in this chapter, we need to inquire about the philosophical reasons for Schoenberg's being a blind spot within Wittgenstein's philosophical outlook. This takes us to the heart of Cavell's allegory in "Philosophy and the Unheard." The most obvious reason, which inexplicably escaped Cavell, is this: the latter, post-1923 Schoenberg was not a composer for the time of civilization (i.e., for that specious present of cultural decline), but a composer *for the future*. Schoenberg maintained that there was no escape from total chromaticism; for him, the genie of dissonance, once emancipated, could never be returned to the bottle. He argued that his "method for composing with twelve tones which are related only with one another" is a necessary step in the evolution of Western music, and he designed it for the sole purpose of replacing the structural differentiations formerly furnished by tonality, thus enacting a revolution that would ensure that German music would reign supreme for the next hundred years or more.

Yet, as a matter of fact, Wittgenstein had his own unique vision of the music of the future.[25] Wittgenstein envisioned the music of the future as consisting in one voice [*einstimmig*], not as a continuation of the currently predominant, culturally entrenched musical formats that embody myriad voices. Rather, the future of music in Wittgenstein's program would mark a new cultural epoch by being "simple, transparent. In a certain sense, naked." Once again, Wittgenstein shows an allegiance with Spengler, who maintained that when a culture enters its final phases, artists simply work with the hollow forms of the old culture without understanding their essence, whereas the future always transcends the current epoch by means of a return to the simplest, most basic expressions of life, which are bound to

reveal their limitations and could constitutes the praxeological grounds for setting up ideals as "measuring rods" for a culture—a *new* culture, perhaps.

I contend that there can be no sharper contrast than the one between Wittgenstein's vision of the music of the future and Schoenberg's.[26] This contrast obfuscates Cavell's attempted allegory in "Philosophy and the Unheard." Central to Cavell's allegory is the notion, borrowed from David Lewin, of Schoenberg's twelve-tone row as an exemplification of that which is "unheard" and yet *omnipresent* in the realization of the musical work, in the communicable gesture. Still, one needs to get clear about the nature of the "unheard" here and to see whether it is indeed illuminatingly comparable to Wittgenstein's notion of grammar.

In the context of Schoenberg's twelve-tone system, the "unheard" is nothing more than a set of potential pitch relations without any motivic content that, in a sense, is "logically prior" to the composition. When embodied in the actual musical details of a given composition, it determines the succession of pitches used in a piece, although it does not determine their registers or their durations, nor prescribe the textural layout of the music or its form. Schoenberg conceived the twelve-tone row as a pre-compositional, musically inert fund for motivic possibilities, whence springs its sense of (unheard) omnipresence in the realized composition. The twelve-tone system is an extraordinary attempt to derive, through a series of deliberate, calculated manipulations, a wealth of material, complex and varied, from such a musically inert initial pitch collection. These procedures are driven, as Schoenberg put it, by "the desire for a conscious control over the new means and forms," which requires the composer to "find, if not laws or rules, at least ways to justify the dissonant character of these harmonies and their successions."[27]

The contrived nature of twelve-tone composition gives the notion of comprehensibility primarily theoretical importance for Schoenberg, not just personal, as

Cavell noted in his lecture. The twelve-tone method is designed to provide both coherence and variation in the musical material. For Schoenberg, coherence is a necessary condition for comprehensibility, which in turn ultimately amounts to the listener's ability to analyze quickly, to determine components and their coherence. Conditions for comprehensibility in dodecaphonic music are thus dependent upon the correct, conscious application of the kind of contrived rules that would ensure coherence. "Composition with twelve tones has no other aim than comprehensibility," declared Schoenberg.[28]

Such an emphasis on comprehensibility brings to mind the famous repartee by Karl Kraus, which Wittgenstein surely would have appreciated: "The most incomprehensible talk comes from people who have no other use for language than to make themselves understood."[29] Schoenberg perceived cultural decline as a license (ironically, Schoenberg sought its legitimacy in Kraus) to invent auxiliary means of expression in order to regain control over unruly atonality for the sake of posterity. Schoenberg contended that:

> One may let oneself be carried by language, but it carries only the man who would be capable, if it did not exist, of inventing it himself. "Language, mother of thought," says Karl Kraus—as wrongly as if he had said the hen is there before the eggs. And as rightly.[30]

Along with Schoenberg's advice to his students—to go on composing using traditional gestures of dynamics, form, and performance practice—the above contention signifies Schoenberg's decisive transgression *beyond* Wittgenstein's scheme of musical decline by means of the twelve-tone system, creating "a homunculus in music,"[31] as Heinrich Schenker called it, indeed, as an image of an invasive, abnormal occurrence in the corpus of an otherwise exhausted culture as it turns into civilization.

The "Schoenbergian unheard," then, is not only patently contrived, but also designed to dislodge tonality and forcefully take over its status as "phenomenology, and therefore grammar,"[32] which for Wittgenstein is inseparable from our ways of life, from "the pervasive yet unforeseen conditions of our existence," as Cavell put it in his lecture.[33] For Wittgenstein, the language of tonality is inextricably, internally related to who we are as human beings who partake in a certain culture. "Could one reason be given at all for why the theory of harmony is the way it is?" asked Wittgenstein, "[a]nd, first and foremost, must such a reason be given? It is here and it is part of our entire life."[34]

Schenker contended that "the great proof against Schoenberg is the people."[35] Such a notion can be insightfully recast along Wittgensteinian lines. There is simply no reason for the rules of the twelve-tone method (which are designed to ensure coherence and comprehensibility for the realized composition) to be what they are, given the kind of beings we are, the purposes we have, our shared discriminatory capacities, and certain general features of the world we inhabit. The kind of musical distinctions called for by the mechanical manipulation of the "Schoenbergian unheard" in order to generate coherent and varied materials for dodecaphonic composing—for instance, identifying a certain passage as based on a certain transposition of the inverted retrograde form of the original twelve-tone row used in the given piece—are not just very difficult to make, they are simply not important in our everyday lives.

Thus, it's clearly not the case that the "Schoenbergian unheard" in all its transformations could have been what Wittgenstein had in mind as "a paradigm" of its sonic occurrences—and by "paradigm" Wittgenstein means "the rhythm of our language, of our thinking & feeling."

> If I say [about a musical theme] e.g.: it's as if here a conclusion were being drawn, or, as if here something were being confirmed, or, as if *this* were a reply to what came earlier,—then the way I understand it clearly presupposes familiarity with conclusions, confirmations, replies, etc.[36]

Wittgenstein's point is that for music to be characterizable, for it to have a face that "wears an expression," that is, akin to a familiarly human face, it must be interrelated with a host of other language games in which corresponding moves are presupposed and ultimately linked to "the whole field of our language games."

Yet, the "Schoenbergian unheard" in and of itself remains patently inert with respect to "the whole field of our language games." In the realized dodecaphonic piece, if there is a sense in which "the theme interacts with language,"[37] it is due only to Schoenberg's contention that whereas the materials need to be generated by means of the twelve-tone method "you use the row and compose as you had done it previously. […] Use the same kind of form and expression, the same themes, melodies, sounds, rhythms as you used before."[38] But this is precisely where we get a sense of Schenker's contention that Schoenberg was producing "a homunculus in music." And this is precisely where the philosophical contrast between the "Schoenbergian unheard" and its purported Wittgensteinian counterpart comes to a head. Whereas Schoenberg's music of the future inheres in comprehensibility, Wittgenstein's music of the future inheres in transparency. Both are kinds of understanding but the contrast between them could not be more striking, and as Cavell would insist, they are joined also by distinctly different urges to misunderstand.

Wittgenstein's notion of transparency is twofold. It pertains equally to cultural critique and to our knowledge of human beings. For Wittgenstein, an important aspect of cultural decline is the paradoxical obfuscation of the notion of transparency. Clarity becomes

only a means to construct ever more complicated structures; it is no longer an end in itself. "For me," Wittgenstein wrote, "on the contrary clarity, transparency, is an end in itself. I am not interested in erecting a building but in having the foundations of possible buildings transparently before me."[39] Wittgenstein's sense of transparency as surveyability is diametrically opposed to what is prescribed by the form of progress that Schoenberg, by his own admission, epitomized in his composition and theory, and of which Wittgenstein became increasingly suspicious and hostile. From Wittgenstein's perspective, then, Schoenberg's notion of comprehensibility amounts to using transparency as a means to compulsive over-structuring of "a building" as well as a fragmentation into calculable objects that reduce human expression to a method and a mechanism. Wittgenstein's contrary vision of the music of the future as transparent, naked, in one voice, exemplifies a sense of "attunement" (to use Cavell's word).[40]

There are additional aspects of transparency that relate to Wittgenstein's notion of knowing other human beings [*Menschenkenntnis*]. His discussion of our knowledge of human beings occurs in the so-called second part of the *Investigations* and it is fundamental to Cavell's remarks on the idea of soul-blindness in *The Claim of Reason*. For Wittgenstein, this sort of knowledge is a *skill*, an accomplished sensitivity to human physiognomy, an instance of "knowing how" rather than "knowing that." Such a skill cannot be accounted for in strictly epistemic terms since it admits into our judgements what he called "imponderable evidence." In Wittgenstein's view, this situation deeply characterizes our human lives and our daily exchanges with one another and the world. Importantly, I maintain, musical experience afforded Wittgenstein a genuine locus—a myriad of natural, everyday, straightforwardly instructive occasions and exemplars—for this kind of knowledge of human beings.[41]

Becoming one who knows human beings does not involve acquiring a technique but rather correct judgements of particular instances. The imponderability of the kind of evidence

that is brought in support of such correct judgements is significantly reflected in how we attempt to communicate our knowledge of human beings, and in how the success of our justifications is measured. If we are successful, then the other person displays a willingness to follow the rules of the game that we are playing; in other words, to use concepts based on imponderable evidence. This imponderable, non-reductive measure of success marks the aesthetic achievement of "getting it right," a notion that clearly separates Wittgenstein's account of transparency from Schoenberg's description of comprehensibility. The moment of "getting it right" consists in an interrelated move in a language game, which can only be understood within the context of correlate, logically prior moves in "the whole field of our language games," hence constituted indeterminately—*and* because it is internally related to the experience involved.

For Wittgenstein, a musical gesture is transparent in this sense because it is *already* given to us with a familiar physiognomy, which is internally related to the preconditions as well as the lived, embodied realities of musical intelligibility. That is, for Wittgenstein, there is no sense in which we can say that a musical gesture needs to be made comprehensible. The "Schoenbergian unheard" necessitates comprehensibility precisely because it is external to "the whole field of our language games." In such cases, the strict, conscious, technically correct application of the rules would be crucial. By contrast, according to Wittgenstein, a musical gesture (in the language of tonality) is not transparent by virtue of a mechanism for correct application of some postulated "rules of transparency." Rather, its transparency resides precisely in the absence of such rules, indeed in the vacuity of the very notion that they are part of the reactions by which, as Wittgenstein said, "people find one another."[42] Music is physiognomic, intransitively transparent to human life; it betokens our capacity to make increasingly nuanced comparisons between multiform human practices as we chart the unexpected topography of the resemblances that give unity to our ways of being in the world.

Importantly, then, from Wittgenstein's perspective, the Schoenbergian idea of the row with its unforeseen yet pervasive consequences turns out to be tantamount to an idea of grammar for a music for the meaning-blind.

I conclude by addressing Cavell's final suggestion in "Philosophy and the Unheard," which he leaves undeveloped, that the allegory of Wittgenstein and Schoenberg may enable one to envision what a philosophy of music *should be*, one which is itself illuminated by musical procedure. The kind of musical procedure that is involved in an unfolding of the "Schoenbergian unheard," as I argued above, cannot be philosophical illuminating if the task of philosophy concerns, as Cavell insisted, a return to the everyday. Simply put, there is nothing about the manipulations of the twelve-tone row that could be brought back to our ordinary experience.

Furthermore, even concerning the era of common-practice music, when Wittgenstein discussed with Felix Salzer the music theory of Heinrich Schenker, which met with Wittgenstein's general approval, he is reported to have said to Salzer that Schenker's theory, with its distinct way of analyzing musical procedures by relating them to a musical prototype, needed to be "boiled down."[43] By this phrase he meant, I take it, that musical procedures cannot illuminate philosophy if they are to be taken as bypassing musical understanding that is ultimately interrelated with "the whole field of our language games." And musical understanding is not just one thing, but many. Wittgenstein argued that "considering the piece in Schenker's way," i.e., as a mere musical procedure, is only one possible criterion for understanding what the music means.[44] It is but one among many reactions which enable us to distinguish between someone who hears with understanding and someone who merely hears.

Cavell's sincerely opens his lecture by vouching for what he has always demanded from philosophy:

> [A]n understanding precisely of what I had sought in music, and in the understanding of music, of what demanded that reclamation of experience, of the capacity for being moved, which called out for, and sustained, an accounting as lucid as the music I loved.[45]

For these reasons, Cavell's perspective connects with Wittgenstein's unique quest for thinking about language as music, for invoking the understanding of a musical theme as a guide to philosophical understanding. For Cavell, this notion holds out "the promise of an understanding without meanings, […] a utopian glimpse of a new, or undiscovered, relation to language, to its sources in the world, to its means of expression."[46]

Yet to uphold Cavell's vision of philosophy requires, as Wittgenstein did, shunning the illusion that our ordinary way of separating language and music implies that the distinction is, or could ever be, underpinned theoretically. The resources for drawing a line between language and musical procedure, that is, language itself, may not be sufficient to describe the musical "side" of the line, which, as Wittgenstein pointed out, we inevitably experience transparently, that is, in ways language can neither fully circumscribe nor make intelligible to us. Let this finding serve as an important lesson to be learned from Cavell's odd couple—Schoenberg and Wittgenstein—one that I imagine Cavell would have agreed with: that philosophy, as it mattered most to him, has no business with music for the meaning-blind.

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[1] Stanley Cavell, "Philosophy and the Unheard," in *Here and There: Sites of Philosophy*, ed. Nancy Bauer, Alice Crary, and Sandra Laugier (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022), 260-68.
[2] Ibid., 267.
[3] See Eran Guter, "'A Surrogate for the Soul': Wittgenstein and Schoenberg," in *Interactive Wittgenstein: Essays in Memory of Georg Henrik von Wright*, Synthese Library, vol. 349, ed. Enzo De Pellegrin (New York: Springer, 2011), 109-52.

[4] Cavell, "Philosophy and the Unheard," *Here and There*, 267.
[5] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, revised edition, ed. G. H. von Wright, with Heikki Nyman, rev. ed. by Alois Pichler, trans. Peter Winch (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006 [1998]), 8.
[6] Georg Henrik von Wright, "Ludwig Wittgenstein in Relation to his Times," in *Wittgenstein and his Times*, ed. Brian F. McGuinness (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982). Stanley Cavell, "Declining Decline," in *The Cavell Reader*, ed. Stephen Mulhall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996),.
[7] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Movements of Thought: Diaries, 1930-1932, 1936-1937*, ed. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 25; see also Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 16.
[8] Von Wright, "Ludwig Wittgenstein in Relation to his Times," *Wittgenstein and his Times*, 118.
[9] Cavell, "Declining Decline, " *The Cavell Reader*, 337.
[10] Ibid., 344-45.
[11] Cavell, "Philosophy and the Unheard," *Here and There*, 267.
[12] Von Wright, "Ludwig Wittgenstein in Relation to his Times," *Wittgenstein and his Times*, 118. Cavell, "Declining Decline, " *The Cavell Reader*, 336.
[13] Cavell, "Declining Decline, " *The Cavell Reader*, 345.
[14] See Eran Guter, "'A Surrogate for the Soul,'" *Interactive Wittgenstein* and also "The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous: Wittgenstein on Modern and Future Musics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 73, no. 4 (2015): 427-39.
[15] See Byron Almén, "Prophets of the Decline: The Worldviews of Heinrich Schenker and Oswald Spengler," *Indiana Theory Review*, 17 (1996): 1-24.
[16] Wittgenstein, *Movements of Thought*, 67-69; see Guter, "The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.
[17] *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 112.
[18] Ibid., 71.
[19] See Guter, "The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.
[20] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 17; italics in original.
[21] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein Source*, MS 120, 72v (2019), wittgensteinsource.org.
[22] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 77; italics in original.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Yuval Lurie, *Wittgenstein on the Human Spirit* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 150.
[25] Wittgenstein, *Movements of Thought*, 49.
[26] See Guter, "'A Surrogate for the Soul,'" *Interactive Wittgenstein*.
[27] Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea: Selected Writings*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 218.
[28] Ibid., 215.
[29] Karl Kraus, *Half-Truths and One-and-a-Half-Truths: Selected Aphorisms* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1990), 65.
[30] Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 369.
[31] Robert Snarrenberg, *Schenker's Interpretative Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 69.
[32] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 53.
[33] Cavell, "Philosophy and the Unheard," *Here and There*, 267.
[34] Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein Source*, 157a, 24–26; my translation.

[35] Snarrenberg, *Schenker's Interpretative Practice*, 69.
[36] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 59; italics added.
[37] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 60.
[38] Schoenberg, *Style and Idea*, 213.
[39] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 9.
[40] See Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 32.
[41] See Eran Guter, "Musicking as Knowing Human Beings," in *Intercultural Understanding after Wittgenstein*, ed. Carla Carmona, David Perez-Chico, and Chon Tejedor (London: Anthem, 2023), 77-91.
[42] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, *Volume 1* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), §874.
[43] See Guter, "The Good, the Bad, and the Vacuous," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.
[44] Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein Source*, 153b, 60v-61r.
[45] Cavell, "Philosophy and the Unheard," *Here and There*, 260.
[46] Ibid., 261.