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# INVENTED TRADITION IN ANTON WEBERN'S STRING TRIO, OP. 20

CATHERINE NOLAN

## INVENTED TRADITION IN PERSPECTIVE

The historiographical concept of invented tradition, as developed by the late historian Eric Hobsbawm, refers to the characterization of new cultural practices in terms that suggest a direct link with the past, but are in fact quite recent in origin and are in some degree of conflict with past practices. An authoritative connection with the past serves to soften the impact of revolutionary achievements, and renders such achievements more comprehensible and accessible.

Hobsbawm writes:

“Invented tradition” is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seem to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.<sup>1</sup>

Hobsbawm further points out that the invention of tradition is of particular interest during periods of rapid change, and is careful to distinguish between tradition, which bears a symbolic function, and mere convention or routine.<sup>2</sup> The notion of invented tradition is of interest in helping us to understand better how composers of modernist European art music in the first half of the twentieth century understood their connection with the past. Invented tradition implies critical *reinvention*, adapting elements of a traditional practice or practices that contribute to new creative practices. Invented tradition transforms, and does not merely imitate.

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983), 1. Hobsbawm's particular field of study was British history and cultural traditions; his concept of invented tradition as evidenced in the cited collection of essays inspired other historians and anthropologists, and bears adaptation to aesthetic issues in the music of the early twentieth century. He died in October 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, 1–3.

The concept of invented tradition offers a constructive means for framing allusions to traditional musical forms in the wake of modernist innovations in the early twentieth century. A particularly compelling illustration is found in the instrumental twelve-tone works of Anton Webern. All of these works bear traditional, generic titles that evoke formal associations with the music of his Austro-German heritage: String Trio (Op. 20); Symphony (Op. 21); Quartet for Violin, Clarinet, Tenor Saxophone, and Piano (Op. 22); Concerto for Nine Instruments (Op. 24); Variations for Piano (Op. 27); String Quartet (Op. 28); and Variations for Orchestra (Op. 30). More specifically, these titles are associated with models of instrumental tonal music from the Austro-German heritage of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> The implied continuity with the past in these works is, however, contradicted by the radically new means of pitch organization and relations.

Historian Hannah Arendt speculates that the perseverance of elements of a tradition belongs to the process of decline and death of the tradition.

The end of a tradition does not necessarily mean that traditional concepts have lost their power over the minds of [individuals]. On the contrary, it sometimes seems that this power of well-worn notions and categories becomes more tyrannical as the tradition loses its living force and as the memory of its beginning recedes; it may even reveal its full coercive force only after its end has come . . . .<sup>4</sup>

In a positive light that contrasts with Arendt's rather gloomy perspective and emphasizes the creativity of new discursive practices, we can understand the adaptation of inherited formal models to twelve-tone instrumental composition as an invented tradition. The traditions that inspired the formal outlines of Webern's instrumental twelve-tone works did not vanish; indeed,

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<sup>3</sup> Webern, like Schoenberg, employed similar titles for his instrumental pre-twelve-tone works as well, but the miniature formal designs in those works defy the association with traditional formal models.

<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt, "Tradition and the Modern Age," in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 26. Quoted in Joan Allen Smith, *Schoenberg and His Circle: A Viennese Portrait* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1986), 7.

the association of traditional formal designs with twelve-tone instrumental composition remained strong and vital until after Webern's death.

Reverence for and commitment to musical tradition were defining features of the Schoenberg circle. Like Schoenberg, Webern was well versed in the Austro-German tonal repertoire, and expressed his ideas about musical form in familiar, traditional terms.<sup>5</sup> Also like Schoenberg, his teaching mission was devoted to transmitting knowledge of the traditional forms and tonal relations of his musical heritage. Even with the radical reformulation of pitch relations inherent in the twelve-tone system, traditional models of musical form continued to hold their authority in the domain of instrumental music until well into the twentieth century. Pierre Boulez's well-known criticism of Schoenberg for his adherence to "preexisting rhetoric" in his 1952 essay, "Schoenberg is Dead," indicates the shift away from the historical consciousness of Schoenberg's and Webern's music that characterized the serial movement of the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the perseverance of the authority of traditional models of musical form lies in conflict with the revolutionary treatment of pitch relations conceived in the twelve-tone method.

This essay will examine Webern's String Trio, Op. 20, from the perspective of invented tradition. Paradoxically, the String Trio also marks a conclusive revision of Webern's compositional methodology,<sup>7</sup> and it is the first of his twelve-tone compositions to invite consideration in terms of traditional musical forms. The essay will reveal new discursive practices in this pivotal work that shaped syntactical and semantic features of Webern's twelve-tone compositional idiom, and will close with a brief consideration of invented tradition and musical modernism.

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, ed. Gerald Strang (London: Faber and Faber, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Boulez, "Schoenberg is Dead," *The Score* 6 (1952): 18–22.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Unverricht, "Traditionelles in neuer Struktur: Zu Weberns Streichtrio op. 20," in *Altes im Neuen: Festschrift Theodor Göllner zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Bernd Edelmann and Manfred Hermann Schmidt (Tutzing: H. Schneider, 1995): 377–385.

Webern himself alludes to something like the trope of invented tradition in the sketches for a string trio fragment that he worked on prior to beginning work on Op. 20 itself. In a revealing sketch, he identified the basic row as “tonic” (abbreviated T) and its tritone transposition as “dominant” (abbreviated D).<sup>8</sup> Here Webern metaphorically invokes traditional terminology for the two principal tonal regions to illuminate the new guiding principle of the bilateral symmetry of the equally divided octave space. Reflecting a few years later on traditional terminology in the context of the twelve-tone method in one of the 1932 lectures transcribed in *The Path to the New Music*, Webern alludes again to the invention of tradition by drawing on the same metaphor for the symmetric division of the octave into two parts:

Aspects of symmetry and regularity are now at the forefront, in contrast to the previous emphasis on the principal intervals—the dominant, subdominant, and mediant, etc. For that reason the *midpoint* of the octave—the diminished fifth—is now of greatest significance.<sup>9</sup>

Webern created for the first time in the composition of the String Trio, Op. 20, a table that exhaustively listed all forty-eight row transformations in terms of transpositions of the basic quartet of rows—the prime, retrograde, inversion, and retrograde-inversion. After creating this table for the composition of Op. 20, he continued to create comprehensive row tables based on transpositions of the basic row quartet for his twelve-tone compositions. Once he began working with comprehensive row tables, Webern abandoned the terminology of tonic and dominant for the basic row quartet and its tritone transposition in favor of enumerating all row forms from 1

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<sup>8</sup> The sketch, M. 273, is held in the Anton Webern Collection at the Paul Sacher Stiftung, and is reproduced in Felix Wörner, “. . . was die Methode der ‘12-Ton-Komposition’ alles zeitigt . . .”: Anton Weberns Aneignung der Zwölftontechnik 1924–1935 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 80.

<sup>9</sup> Anton Webern, *Der Weg zur neuen Musik*, ed. Willi Reich (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1960), 58. “Gesichtspunkte der Symmetrie, Regelmäßigkeit treten jetzt gegenüber der früheren Hervorhebung der Hauptintervalle—Dominante, Unterdominante, Mediant etc.—in den Vordergrund. Daher ist jetzt die *Mitte* der Octav—die verminderte Quint—von größter Bedeutung.” (Translations from this source, here and elsewhere, are mine.)

through 48, following a systematic method that transposed the basic row quartet through a predetermined ordering of the eleven non-0 intervals.<sup>10</sup> This significant change in Webern's working methods attests to a fundamentally new and comprehensive conception of twelve-tone relations.

The trope of invented tradition demands a reevaluation of the relationship between past and present, old and new. Its inherent ambivalence is consistent with the ideals of the Schoenberg circle, whose members did not like to be regarded as revolutionaries, and yet indisputably changed the course of European music.<sup>11</sup> In the context of instrumental twelve-tone works, the concept of invented tradition further illuminates the interaction of organizational principles of (outer) form and (inner) content or discourse.

We turn now to the chronology of Webern's String Trio, Op. 20, in an attempt to revisit our understanding of historical considerations surrounding Webern's adoption of the twelve-tone method in instrumental composition after an intense period of initiation in vocal media.

#### CHRONOLOGY OF WEBERN'S STRING TRIO, OP. 20

Webern completed the String Trio, Op. 20, in 1927, only a few years after Schoenberg purportedly proclaimed his radically new method of composition to Webern and a select group of students.<sup>12</sup> Webern's return to instrumental writing in the String Trio, after over a decade of

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<sup>10</sup> See Kathryn Bailey, "Webern's Row Tables," in *Webern Studies*, ed. Kathryn Bailey (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996): 170–228. Prior to the comprehensive row tables showing all forty-eight row transpositions, Webern constructed a table of only the eight rows used in Op. 19, the first work in which he used a single row for all movements. He constructed similarly reduced row tables for the two sets of songs for voice and piano, Opp. 23 and 25, his first settings of texts by Hildegard Jone. (See Bailey, "Webern's Row Tables," 194–195 and 198–199.)

<sup>11</sup> See Carl Dahlhaus, *Schoenberg and the New Music*, trans. Derrick Puffett and Alfred Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 32–33.

<sup>12</sup> The date of Schoenberg's proclamation has been the subject of some controversy, which is examined in connection with recently discovered source documents in Fusako Hamao, "Redating Schoenberg's Announcement

writing for voice, marked a pivotal turning point in his career.<sup>13</sup> The String Trio came on the heels of an intense period of about two years during which Webern composed his first twelve-tone works, all scored for voice or chorus and a variety of eclectic accompanying forces: Op. 17 (Three Traditional Rhymes, 1925), Op. 18 (Three Songs, 1925), and Op. 19 (Two Songs, 1926).<sup>14</sup> As Anne Shreffler has demonstrated, Webern's initiation into the new venue of twelve-tone composition began by adapting techniques for vocal writing that were already deeply familiar to him and incorporated the semantic dimension of the text.<sup>15</sup>

Webern's works from Op. 12, Four Songs for Voice and Piano (completed in 1917), to Op. 19, Two Songs (for mixed chorus and instruments, completed in 1926), are frequently described as his "middle period,"<sup>16</sup> and comprise a heterogeneous group of vocal works, settings of texts by a variety of authors. In the midst of this succession of vocal compositions Webern began to experiment with the basic elements of the twelve-tone method in the compositional process for Op. 15, Five Sacred Songs for voice and small ensemble, and Op. 16, Five Canons for soprano, clarinet, and bass clarinet, only to reject those experiments in the definitive

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of the Twelve-Tone Method: A Study of Recollections," in *A Music-Theoretical Matrix: Essays in Honor of Allen Forte (Part III)*, ed. David Carson Berry, *Gamut* 4/1 (2011): 231–297.

<sup>13</sup> In 1924 and 1925 Webern experimented with instrumental composition in the twelve-tone method with two short works for piano, and two fragments in the string trio and string quartet mediums, before embarking in earnest on Op. 20. The two fragmentary piano works, *Klavierstück* and *Kinderstück*, were both written in 1924 and published posthumously. In 1925 Webern also drafted two twelve-tone string trio fragments and one twelve-tone string quartet fragment while completing Opp. 17–19. See Anne C. Schreffler, "'Mein Weg geht jetzt vorüber': The Vocal Origins of Webern's Twelve-Tone Composition," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 47/2 (1994), 285, and Wörner, ". . . was die Methode der '12-ton-Komposition' alles zeitigt . . .," 57.

<sup>14</sup> The instrumental accompanying forces for these works are all unconventional. Three Traditional Rhymes, Op. 17, is scored for voice and clarinet, bass clarinet, and violin (viola in the third song); Three Songs, Op. 18, is scored for voice, Eb clarinet, and guitar; and Two Songs, Op. 19, is scored for mixed chorus, celesta, guitar, violin, clarinet, and bass clarinet.

<sup>15</sup> Shreffler, "'Mein Weg geht jetzt vorüber,'" 335–336.

<sup>16</sup> See Julian Johnson, "Webern's 'Middle Period': Body of the Mother or Law of the Father?," *repercussions* 6/1 (1997), 61–108. Johnson discusses the same works from a slightly different perspective in Chapter 4 of his book *Webern and the Transformation of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 128–166. See also Robert Harry Hallis, "Reevaluating the Compositional Process of Anton Webern: 1910–1925" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Texas at Austin, 2004).

compositions.<sup>17</sup> The notion of ordering the aggregate of twelve pitch classes was seemingly incompatible at this time with his compositional goals.

The last three works of this period (Opp. 17, 18, and 19), however, are fully twelve-tone compositions; these works are quite limited in their technical range in comparison to his mature twelve-tone compositions. Figure 1 summarizes Webern's acquisition of technique in the twelve-tone method through the song settings, Opp. 17 and 18, and the choral setting, Op. 19, and illustrates the new expansiveness in technique and form in the String Trio. For example, each of the six songs in Opp. 17 and 18 is based on a single, unique row that serves as a device for building local coherence in a single song.<sup>18</sup> The choral work, Op. 19, employs a single row for both movements, a strategy that imparts for the first time in Webern's adoption of the twelve-tone method a new degree of global coherence to the work as a whole. While the three songs of Op. 17 use only a single untransformed row, the second and third songs of Op. 18 mark Webern's first use of the four basic serial transformations of the row; and in Op. 19, he extends his use of the system by adding to the four basic serial transformations the  $T_6$  transform of each, doubling the number of rows that appear from four to eight, and he employs the same eight rows in the two movements. Thus, in Op. 19 we can identify Webern's extended understanding of the potential for the twelve-tone method to govern not only local and motivic relationships, but to provide a template for coherence across all the movements of a work through a common row and an expanded set of row transformations. He recognized the potential for the row and its transformations to generate musical content and form.

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<sup>17</sup> Shreffler, "Mein Weg geht jetzt vorüber," 288–319.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Sallmen examines the twenty-two consecutive deployments of the row for the first song of Op. 18, "Shatzerl Klein." Sallmen's analysis identifies partial statements of other row forms formed by adjacent and non-adjacent pitches within the context of the succession of statements of the basic row. See Sallmen, "Composition with a Single Row Form?: Webern's 'Shatzerl Klein,' Op. 18, No. 1," *Intégral* 16/17: (2002–2003), 139–185.



**FIGURE 1.** Chronology and acquisition of Webern’s twelve-tone technique from Op. 17 to Op. 20

Movement	Date*	Techniques
Op.17/I: “Armer Sünder, du”	autumn 1924	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• single row</li> <li>• succession of partially ordered aggregates</li> </ul>
Op.17/III: “Heiland, unsre Missetaten”	11 July 1925	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• single row</li> <li>• two dimensions: (1) strict linear row statements in voice, while (2) remaining order positions in instruments complete successive aggregates</li> </ul>
Op. 17/II: “Liebste Jungfrau”	17 July 1925	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• single row</li> <li>• succession of strictly ordered aggregates (in one dimension)</li> </ul>
Op.18/I: “Schatzerl klein”	10 Sept. 1925	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• single row</li> <li>• succession of strictly ordered aggregates (as in Op. 17/II)</li> </ul>
Op.18/II: “Erlösung”	27 Sept. 1925	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• basic row quartet</li> <li>• one row at a time</li> <li>• association of twelve-tone technique with characters in text and large-scale form</li> </ul>
Op.18/III: “Ave, Regina coelorum”	28 Oct. 1925	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• basic row quartet</li> <li>• three rows at a time (each character—Mother, Father, Child—assigned its own row succession)</li> <li>• association of twelve-tone technique and texture</li> </ul>
Op. 19/I: “Weiß wie Lilien”	Dec. 1925– Jan. 1926	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• single row class for both movements</li> <li>• basic row quartet plus <math>T_6</math> transposition</li> <li>• same 8 rows in both movements</li> <li>• new partitioning techniques</li> </ul>
Op. 19/II: “Ziehn die Schafe”	8 July 1926	
Op. 20/II	summer 1926– early 1927	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 44 of 48 rows in the row class in the two movements</li> <li>• technical and formal expansion</li> </ul>
Op. 20/I	summer 1926– end June 1927	

\* Dates are taken from Hans Moldenhauer and Rosaleen Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), Appendix 1, 712–714.

In light of this recognition, it was surely inevitable that Webern would again turn his attention to composing for instrumental forces. The absence of a text demanded a fresh compositional outlook, and provided a context in which the composer could explore—on an expanded scale and independent of the external referents of text—the inherent relations and

resources available in the twelve-tone system. His nuanced explorations of pitch relations within the row and of general relations available within the system of twelve tones in the String Trio were unprecedented.

The return to instrumental forces and the sudden new expansiveness in length and complexity, both a consequence of the increased number of row transformations employed in the String Trio (forty-four of the forty-eight rows in both movements) in comparison to the preceding vocal and choral twelve-tone works, distinguish the String Trio as a signal turning point for Webern. Analogies with musical tradition provide us with familiar terminology for identifying formal units and relations, and yet these same analogies diminish the impact of the radically new compositional spaces in which these formal units and relations are enacted. The trope of invented tradition recognizes that traditional formal types serve as an analytical heuristic triggered by the composer's new commitment to writing twelve-tone music in an instrumental medium.<sup>19</sup>

The String Trio, written over the course of about a year from the summer of 1926 to June 1927, reveals, as mentioned, Webern's acceleration in technical mastery of and confidence with the twelve-tone idiom with which he had first experimented four years earlier. Like Schoenberg, he sought new solutions to the challenge of composing in extended forms, and in reference to the String Trio wrote, in a letter to Berg, about the satisfaction he found in writing "longer stretches

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<sup>19</sup> The trope of invented tradition in this essay contrasts sharply with Kathryn Bailey's view that Webern literally returned to traditional formal models and aspired to preserve them. Bailey writes: "All of the movements of Webern's twelve-note instrumental music follow traditional models. Webern was, after all, the product of a formal European musical education, and it is not surprising that the works of his mature period should be cast in those forms upon which his musical awakening had been based. His return to the forms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries after the aphoristic, non-traditional forms of his middle years indicates his faith in the validity of a manner of organization that some of his more radical contemporaries . . . were simultaneously rejecting" (Bailey, *The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern: Old Forms in a New Language* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991], 2–3). In contrast, Andrew Mead recognizes the highly inventive pursuit of new varieties of pitch relations in Webern's twelve-tone works. Mead writes: "Webern, no less than Schoenberg, saw twelve-tone composition as a solution to the problem of writing extended music in the total chromatic, and his works show an extraordinary sensitivity to the possibilities of the twelve-tone system for embodying the formal strategies of earlier music . . ." (Mead, "Webern, Tradition, and 'Compositing with Twelve Tones . . .,'" *Music Theory Spectrum* 15/2 [1993], 173).

of music” again.<sup>20</sup> No drafts or sketches for the String Trio exist, but as noted earlier, we have Webern’s table of its forty-eight row forms in a format that he devised for this work and subsequently retained for almost all of his later twelve-tone compositions.<sup>21</sup> The row table documents Webern’s understanding of the full range of possibilities for transforming the row within the constraints of the system. The work was originally conceived in three movements, but upon beginning the third Webern decided that the work was already complete in two movements, although it required reversing their originally intended order: the slow movement that he had composed second became the first, and the fast movement that he had composed first became the second.<sup>22</sup>

The score of the String Trio, published soon after its completion, includes a schematic formal analysis of the two movements by Erwin Stein (identified by the initials E.S.).<sup>23</sup> Stein describes in a brief introductory essay the formal design of the two movements in terms that succinctly place the work in the tradition of classical form. After asserting the work’s connection with tradition, Stein turns to the novel features of its thematic and motivic material:

In his manner of developing his motives, however, and in the thematic treatment Webern deviates far from the classic examples. Motives and themes are invariably immediately subjected to a process of variations and wherever they recur, it is in a very modified shape. One “tone series” provides the basic material for the entire composition, as in

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<sup>20</sup> Hans Moldenhauer and Rosaleen Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of His Life and Work* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 320.

<sup>21</sup> The format of the row tables remains virtually the same (except for the abbreviated tables for Opp. 23 and 25, which contain only the rows used rather than the entire set of possibilities). Minor details appear in varying forms from table to table, such as enumeration in Arabic and Roman numerals and his use of colored pencil. See Bailey, “Webern’s Row Tables.”

<sup>22</sup> Moldenhauer and Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern*, 321. This pattern in Webern’s compositional process—conceiving of and then abandoning a third movement, followed by reversing the order of the two completed movements—had already occurred in the Two Songs, Op. 19, and repeated itself again in the Symphony, Op. 21, and the Quartet for Violin, Clarinet, Tenor Saxophone, and Piano, Op. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Webern, *Streichtrio* Op. 20, Philharmonia Partituren No. 175 (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1927/1955). The score of the String Trio, Op. 20, was the first Webern score by Universal Edition to include a formal analysis. Universal Edition included similar formal analyses of other instrumental twelve-tone works by Webern and Schoenberg.

Schönberg's "composition with 12 tones." The parts are, mosaic-like, composed of elements derived from one "tone series." Through various combinations, the same elements serve to create manifold and continually changing sounds. One may well compare this system to the [k]aleidoscope where ever new effects are gained by varying grouping in a number of colours and elements of forms.<sup>24</sup>

Stein's prose conveys the priority of comprehensibility in accessible terms that diminish the impact of the essential reformulation of pitch relations. And yet, Stein's analogy of the kaleidoscope also captures the radically new notion of multiple spatial reflections of row segments (which he calls motives and themes) in the three instrumental parts. Webern's understanding of the far-reaching force of the row is at odds with the close bond with traditional musical form promoted by Stein's formal analysis. To Webern the row was not a theme: it represented a new and original guiding principle, a law of comprehensibility.<sup>25</sup>

Soon after the publication of the score, the String Trio received mixed reviews after prominent performances by the Kolish Quartet (in January 1928 in Vienna) and the Amar Quartet (in May 1928 in Schwerin). Webern was pleased by the Vienna performance, but would have been disheartened by the disarmingly negative reviews of the Schwerin performance.<sup>26</sup> The contrasting responses speak to audience and critic alliances with respect to avant-garde innovation, and bring into relief the dialectic of tradition and innovation that lies at the heart of the trope of invented tradition.

#### NEW DISCURSIVE PRACTICES

The two movements of the String Trio are marked by new discursive practices within structural outlines redolent of traditional classical forms. The second movement, "Sehr getragen

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<sup>24</sup> Webern, *Streichtrio* Op. 20.

<sup>25</sup> He wrote: "The twelve-tone row is, in general, not a 'theme.'" ("Ein 'Thema' is die Zwölftonreihe im allgemeinen nicht.") Webern, *Der Weg zur Neuen Musik*. 59.

<sup>26</sup> Moldenhauer and Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern*, 322–323.

und ausdrucksvoll,” reflects essential design features associated with the normative traditional treatment of first and second theme material in sonata form.<sup>27</sup> Following the Introduction (mm. 1–9), the rows of the Exposition’s first theme group (mm. 10–25) return unchanged at the Recapitulation (mm. 115–130). The rows of the second theme group (mm. 40–73a) return in the Recapitulation transposed by  $T_5$  (mm. 144–174). These correspondences of rows and formal units do not, however, extend to thematic content; indeed, the instrumental writing is highly contrasting in corresponding sections in the exposition and recapitulation. As Andrew Mead has shown, the  $T_5$  relation between the statements of the second theme material in the Exposition and the Recapitulation reflects more than blind imitation of a traditional norm; the pitch material of the second theme incorporates embedded segmental relations with the first theme material and with the movement’s Introduction.<sup>28</sup> Mead writes: “The similarities in [Webern’s] music to tonal forms are not simply the result of superficial modeling, but spring from a deeper level, one at which the relational properties of the [tonal and twelve-tone] grammars allow similar narrative patterns to grow.”<sup>29</sup> Webern never indicated primary and secondary theme groups in his scores with the *Hauptstimme* and *Nebenstimme* symbols that appear in Schoenberg’s scores, another reflection of Webern’s non-thematic strategies in adapting elements of traditional form. The emulation of sonata design in the first movement of the String Trio through  $T_0$  and  $T_5$  correspondences of row successions does not take into account its new discursive practices that extend to row segmentation and register.

Written after the second movement, the first movement, “Sehr langsam,” is more concise and economic in its employment of twelve-tone materials and, perhaps because the composer

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<sup>27</sup> See Bailey, *The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern*, 155–163.

<sup>28</sup> Mead, “Webern, Tradition,” 196–204.

<sup>29</sup> Mead, “Webern, Tradition,” 204.

was not responding to the historical weight of sonata form, simpler and more transparent in design. The movement evinces a clear tripartite design in which the main sections are distinguished by contrasts in rhythmic character, textural density, and register in ways that are anathema to “preexisting rhetoric.” Following a brief discussion of the formal organization of the first movement and the properties of the row for Op. 20, the remainder of this section is devoted to exposing new discursive practices in the movement. This examination will shed light on Webern’s reinterpretation of traditional form and the novelty of his musical language.

The straightforward ternary design of the first movement is illustrated in Figure 2,<sup>30</sup> and a matrix of the row class of forty-eight transformations is given in the Appendix.<sup>31</sup> As Figure 2 shows, successions of complete rows articulate each section and subsection, and only one row is employed at a time. The identity of the rows establishes the identity of recurring subsections within A, B, and A'. Lengths of corresponding subsections are almost always identical, but the two units in subsection a in A' are one measure longer than in A, as is the first unit of section a'. In contrast to the manner in which letter names are typically used in formal analysis to summarize relationships of thematic correspondences and contrasts, corresponding letter names here refer to correspondences of rows. Aural identification of correspondences and contrasts with letter names in any way commensurable with a similar formal chart for a tonal work is highly unlikely for most listeners, unless they have developed great familiarity with the piece.<sup>32</sup> Yet these correspondences and contrasts reveal relations, patterns, and processes that are integral to the work. Paradoxically, the formal plan reveals a bond or connection with tradition, and yet it

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<sup>30</sup> Erwin Stein’s analysis, published in the score for Op. 20, describes the first movement as a rondo. It appears that Stein regarded “rondo” as a generic term for a formal plan that preserved the principle of alternating thematic and contrasting statements.

<sup>31</sup> I use fixed pitch-class integers in the matrix and for row labels. That is, the matrix shows P3 along the top row, as the first row begins on pitch class 3.

<sup>32</sup> Unverricht, “Traditionelles in neuer Struktur,” 379.

**FIGURE 2.** String Trio, Op. 20: formal design of the first movement

Formal plan		Rows	
Introduction		mm. 1–3	P3, RP3
A	a	mm. 4–7 mm. 8–10	RI9, I2, P3 I4, RI7, I1
	b	mm. 10–15	P2, P6, RI1, RP11, RP6
	a'	mm. 16–19 mm. 19–21	RI9, I2, P3 I4, RI7, I1, P2
B	c	mm. 22–30	RI3, RP4, I11, RI7, RP5, RP7, P7
	c'	mm. 31–40	RI3, RP4, I11, RI7, RP5, RP7, P7
Reprise of Introduction		mm. 41–43	P3, RP3
A'	a	mm. 44–48 mm. 48–51	RI9, I2, P3 I4, RI7, I1
	b	mm. 51–56	P2, P6, RI1, RP11, RP6
	a'	mm. 57–61 mm. 61–63	RI9, I2, P3 I4, RI7, I1
Coda		mm. 64–65	RP3

draws attention to essential components of that tradition—tonal relations and thematic recurrences and contrasts—that have been supplanted by unique relations and discursive techniques inspired by the twelve-tone system.

The medium of the string trio is a venerable chamber ensemble from the tonal heritage, yet the compositional techniques in Webern's work, including a reformulated application of invertible counterpoint, are markedly dissimilar from those associated with the traditional genre of chamber music. Formal divisions in the first movement of Op. 20 are articulated by changes in rhythmic character and *ritardandi* within an overall quiet soundscape set forth by the muted strings (for the entire movement) and quiet dynamic range primarily from *pp* to *ppp*, with very brief exceptions the second half in which the dynamic range reaches *f*. The movement's subsections each display strikingly different compositional techniques and new discursive practices, including palindromes and fixed registration of pitches.

**FIGURE 3.** Basic row for Op. 20 in letter-name and integer notations

D <sup>♯</sup>	E <sup>♯</sup>	A <sup>b</sup>	G <sup>♯</sup>	D <sup>♯</sup>	C <sup>♯</sup>	A <sup>♯</sup>	B <sup>b</sup>	F <sup>♯</sup>	F <sup>♯</sup>	B <sup>♯</sup>	C <sup>♯</sup>
3	4	8	7	2	1	9	t	5	6	e	0

We turn now to the construction of the row for the String Trio. The basic row is given in letter-name and pitch-class notation in Figure 3.<sup>33</sup> The succession of discrete half-step dyads is perhaps its most initially striking feature, a feature that determines abstract features of the row class that preserve segmental dyads, tetrachords, and hexachords.<sup>34</sup> The row class consequently subdivides into two groupings of twelve rows (plus their retrogrades) that are associated by sharing the same discrete dyads. The row class also subdivides into six groupings of four rows (plus their retrogrades) that are associated by sharing the same discrete symmetrical tetrachords. Finally, the row class also subdivides into twelve groupings of two rows (plus their retrogrades) sharing the same discrete, inversionally related hexachords. Figure 4 shows the results of these subdivisions of the row class. The simple subdivision into two groupings based on dyadic association effectively divides the row class into two regions, and plays a significant role in the first movement.<sup>35</sup> Not shown in Figure 4 is the way in which the content of the discrete trichords is preserved in the inversionally combinatorial hexachords, so that within each hexachord the trichords appear in reverse order. Webern's attention to the intricacy of these abstract relations in the design of the row is augmented in the assignment of pitch classes to pitches in the medium of the string trio.

<sup>33</sup> The letter names in Figure 3 correspond to the opening row statement of the first movement. The pitch-class notation uses t and e for pitch classes 10 and 11 respectively.

<sup>34</sup> The properties of the row discussed here have been identified by other authors, including George Perle, "Webern's Twelve-Tone Sketches," *Musical Quarterly* 57/1 (1971), 8–9; Ethan Haimo, "Secondary and Disjunct Order-Position Relationships in Webern's Op. 20," *Perspectives of New Music* 24/2 (1986): 403–419; Bailey, *The Twelve-Note Music of Anton Webern*, 16–18; and Mead, "Webern, Tradition," 197–198.

<sup>35</sup> See Haimo, "Secondary and Disjunct Order-Position Relationships," 415.



**FIGURE 4.** Groupings of rows sharing discrete segments

- 2 groupings of 12 rows (plus their retrogrades) sharing discrete dyads (2-1)

P0	P2	P4	P6	P8	P10	P1	P3	P5	P7	P9	P11
I1	I3	I5	I7	I9	I11	I2	I4	I6	I8	I10	I0

- 6 groupings of 4 rows (plus their retrogrades) sharing discrete tetrachords (4-7, 4-7, 4-9)

P0	P6	P1	P7	P2	P8	P3	P9	P4	P10	P5	P11
I11	I5	I0	I6	I1	I7	I2	I8	I3	I9	I4	I10

- 12 groupings of 2 rows (plus their retrogrades) sharing discrete hexachords (6-5)

P0	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11
I7	I8	I9	I10	I11	I0	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6

We turn now to comparisons of three pairs of corresponding passages in the first movement of the String Trio that will serve to illustrate Webern's new discursive practices: mm. 1–4 and mm. 41–43, mm. 4–7 and mm. 16–19, and mm. 10–15 and mm. 51–56.

Comparison of the Introduction (mm. 1–3) and the Reprise of the Introduction (mm. 41–43) reveals Webern's new preoccupation with the device of palindrome in the context of the twelve-tone system.<sup>36</sup> Each passage articulates a succession of retrograde-related rows, P3 and RP3 (and this succession is abbreviated to the single row RP3 in the Coda). The palindrome in mm. 1–3 is rendered literal by the exact replication of pitches, rhythmic values, dynamics, and modes of articulation (*arco*, *pizzicato*, harmonics) from row P3 after the midpoint in row RP3. The presentation and subsequent dissolution of material inherent in the device of palindrome creates an immediate challenge at the movement's beginning to conventional techniques of

<sup>36</sup> It is important to recognize, in light of the well-known preponderance of palindromes in Webern's next work, the Symphony, Op. 21, that the device of palindrome in the first movement of the String Trio in connection with the movement's formal design is truly novel.

FIGURE 5. Webern, Op. 20/I, mm. 1–3 (Introduction)

(a) palindrome (pitches only)

The musical score shows three staves: Violin (top), Viola (middle), and Violoncello (bottom). The Violin staff is labeled with the interval class set  $5-1: \{12345\}$ . The Viola staff is labeled with  $3-1: \{9te\}$ . The Violoncello staff is labeled with  $4-5: \{6780\}$ . The notes are arranged to show a palindromic sequence of pitches across the three instruments.

(b) symmetric registral distribution of violin pitches

A verticalized representation of the violin pitches. The notes are arranged in a vertical column on a single staff. The central pitch is D# (F#4), which is circled. The notes are symmetrically distributed around this central pitch, showing the registral distribution of the violin part.

phrase design in tonal music. The novel conception of temporality and fixed registration of pitches embodied by the palindromic introduction to the movement prepare the listener for a new, spatial conception of musical form. In Figure 5a, the pitches (only) of the three instrumental parts in mm. 1–3 appear, aligned by instrument so as to show the pitch entries in their relative order. Each pitch enters one at a time, articulating the row across the three instruments, while distributing the pitches so that the partitions bring out the characteristic discrete interval-class 1 dyads. The instrumental parts contrast with each other in terms of relative activity (number of pitches) and range. The collected pitches of the violin part, verticalized for convenience in Figure 5b, show the symmetric distribution of pitches around the axis of D#, the referential opening pitch of the movement. Figure 6a shows the pitches of the three instrumental parts in the Reprise of the Introduction from mm. 41–43. The same rows, P3 and RP3, govern the passage, which, like its earlier counterpart, exposes an exact palindrome of pitches. But here dynamics and mode

FIGURE 6. Op. 20/I, mm. 41–43 (Reprise of the Introduction)

(a) palindrome (itches only)

The figure shows three staves of music: Violin, Viola, and Violoncello. The Violin staff is in treble clef and contains a sequence of notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. Below it is the label "4-7: {1256}". The Viola staff is in treble clef and contains notes: E3, F3, G3, A3, G3, F3, E3. Below it is the label "4-7: {e034}". The Violoncello staff is in bass clef and contains notes: G2, F2, E2, D2, E2, F2, G2. Below it is the label "4-1: {789f}".

(b) symmetric registral distribution of violin pitches

The figure shows a single staff in treble clef. It contains a verticalized set of pitches: G4, A4, B4, C5, G4, F4, E4. Below the staff is the label "violin".

of articulation do not correspond in both halves of the palindrome, as the dynamic level diminishes from *pp* to *ppp*, the three instruments play on the bridge, and the tempo slows (*molto rit.*) from the midpoint to the end of the palindrome. As in mm. 1–3, the row is exposed one pitch at a time, but is now partitioned differently. Each instrumental part articulates exactly four unique pitches, and the diversity of relative activity and range are diminished. Figure 6b shows the pitches of the violin part verticalized, symmetrically balanced around the unarticulated axis  $A\sharp/B\flat$ . The resulting 4-7 {1256} tetrachord, formed here non-segmentally by the collected pitch classes of the violin part, corresponds to the segmental 4-7 tetrachord in P1 (first tetrachord) and P7 (second tetrachord); this correspondence between sets and set classes, created by segmental and non-segmental association, reflects Webern's attention to the coordination of local and larger scale invariant pitch relations using uniquely twelve-tone strategies.

FIGURE 7. Op. 20/I, mm. 4-7 and mm. 16-19, partitions by order position

	mm. 4-7			mm. 16-19		
	<b>RI9</b>	<b>I2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>RI9</b>	<b>I2</b>	<b>P3</b>
<b>Violin</b>	<i>t 7 1 0</i>	<i>2 3</i>	<i>1 2 3 9</i>	<i>e 6 5 4</i>	<i>0 1 5 8</i>	<i>0 4 5 6 e</i>
<b>Viola</b>	<i>e 6 5 4</i>	<i>0 1 5 8</i>	<i>0 4 5 6 8 e</i>	<i>9 8 3 2</i>	<i>4 6 7 9 t e</i>	<i>7 t</i>
<b>Violoncello</b>	<i>9 8 3 2</i>	<i>4 6 7 9 t e</i>	<i>7 t</i>	<i>t 7 1 0</i>	<i>2 3</i>	<i>1 2 3 8 9</i>

Webern's spatial conception of formal relations manifests itself from a different perspective in his treatment of corresponding passages in the A section, mm. 4-7 and mm. 16-19 (subsections a and a' as shown in Figure 2). These passages unfold the same rows (RI9, I2, P3) one at a time, but here relationship of the second passage to the first pays homage to the tradition of invertible counterpoint. The technique of invertible counterpoint is reconceived in such a way that repartitions of identical rows by instrument assignment replaces traditional registral reassignment. Figure 7 shows the assignment of order positions in each instrumental part for each row. A consistent procedure is clear in which the partitions by instrument in mm. 4-7 are shifted systematically for each row in all three rows: violoncello to viola, viola to violin, and violin to violoncello. A single exception occurs in which order-position 8 in row P3, which is assigned to the viola in mm. 4-7, is not assigned to the violin in mm. 16-19 in conformance with the pattern, but instead is transferred to the violoncello. One may speculate about the reasons for this small inconsistency (the pitch sounds a grace note in both passages), but it does not detract from the textural clarity and reformulation of what constitutes musical correspondence.

**FIGURE 8.** Webern, Op. 20/I, mm. 10–15 and mm. 51–56

(a) mm. 10–15, fixed pitches

Violin  
3-1: {89t}

Viola  
6-20: {2367te}

Violoncello  
4-7: {0145}

(b) mm. 51–56, fixed pitches

Violin  
6-20: {2367te}

Viola  
5-21: {01458}

Violoncello  
2-1 {9t}

Our third illustration, which compares mm. 10–15 and mm. 51–56 (subsections b in the A and A' sections shown in Figure 2), combines features observed in the preceding illustrations: palindrome, fixed registration of pitches, and repartitioning according to principles of invertible counterpoint. In these passages, six rows are unfolded: P2, P6, RI1, RP11, and RP6. Remarkably, in both passages, pitches are assigned to the same instrument and register throughout the passage as the six rows unfold. Figure 8a shows the pitch assignments for the three instruments in mm. 10–15, starting with the first fixed pitch to sound. Once the collection of pitches for each instru-

ment is complete, reiterations of pitches do not always occur in the same order, but the original pitch field is preserved. The fixed pitches do not begin with order-position 0 of P2, the first row to unfold; rather, the first violoncello pitch is order-position 4, the first violin pitch is order-position 6, and the first viola pitch is order-position 11. That is, the pitch field operates independently of the ordering of the row in any of its transformations. Once the fixed pitch field is established, the same pitches are articulated in register at their order position in the succeeding rows. Note that one pitch class is assigned to two registers in two instruments: B $\flat$ 3 in the viola and B $\flat$ 5 in the violin. Figure 8a also identifies the set class of the pitch field in each instrument from mm. 10–15: 3-1 {89t} in the violin, 6-20 {2367te} in the viola, and 4-7 {1245} in the violoncello. Two of these set classes, 4-7 and 6-20, appear as row segments and reflect the semitone dyadic pairing that characterizes the movement. Each instrument's pitch field is symmetrically distributed around an axis of symmetry as shown in the verticalization of each field.

Similarly, the corresponding passage in the A' section, mm. 51–56, includes fixed pitch fields in each instrument, shown in Figure 8b. The pitch classes of each pitch field are shifted to another instrument following the same procedures as in the invertible counterpoint technique in mm. 4–7 and mm. 16–19. The fixed registration of each pitch is changed from its appearance in mm. 10–15, as is to be expected when the partitions are assigned to different instruments, but the technique is the same. The pitch classes of the violin pitch field from mm. 10–15 are shifted to the violoncello, but pitch class G $\sharp$  is removed from this partition and reassigned to the viola, along with the four pitch classes of the violoncello field from mm. 10–15, transforming the original 4-7 tetrachord into a 5-21 pentachord, {01458}. The pitch classes of viola field are shifted to the violin and reordered.

The pitch stasis of these passages, mm. 10–15 and mm. 51–56, contrasts sharply with the surrounding music. The effect is similar to the palindrome with fixed pitch registration that molds the movement's Introduction (mm. 1–3). Indeed, small-scale palindromes appear within the instrumental parts in mm. 10–15 and mm. 51–56, subsumed within a larger static field. Pitch stasis, as we see here and to an even greater extent in Webern's next composition, the *Symphony*, Op. 21, challenges traditional conceptions of goal-directedness associated with the instrumental forms of tonal music. The techniques discussed here—palindrome, fixed pitch registration, reformulated invertible counterpoint—all contribute to Webern's inspired response to composing again in an instrumental medium with the twelve-tone method. He was knowledgeable about and held the highest reverence for the traditions of European instrumental form, and yet he invented new discursive practices within the outlines of traditional formal designs that lent him his voice as a leader in modernist twelve-tone composition. Webern did not merely imitate the conventions of musical form, as these traditions cannot be disengaged from the tonal language that directs it. The forms in the two movements of the *String Trio* and Webern's later instrumental twelve-tone works invoke the outlines of traditional forms, but replace the language of tonality with a new language. They call on the symbolic function of tradition, which, as Hobsbawm suggested, entails the abstractions of order and unity, and not simply the conventions of that tradition. Invented tradition in Webern's *String Trio* was not imitation, but transformation in a new aesthetic context.

#### INVENTED TRADITION AND MUSICAL MODERNISM

As we have seen, traditional modes of representing the *String Trio*'s formal organization divert attention from the work's radical identification of the twelve-tone system as the source of new discursive practices. The qualitatively new character and techniques of instrumental writing,

the eschewal of “preexisting rhetoric,” and spatial experimentation through registral and temporal symmetry are suggestive of a new discursive space,<sup>37</sup> a space that belies the historical continuity suggested by the string trio medium and genre. In this discursive space, form is not only syntactic; the trope of invented tradition imparts a semantic dimension to musical form and content. The semantic dimension bears no direct connection with verbal language; rather, it lies in the new discursive space created by the paradoxical juxtaposition of traditional formal models with a radical new musical language (while avoiding neoclassical irony).

By calling on the dialectic of tradition and innovation, invented tradition in the context of Webern's String Trio brings new insights into the multifaceted nature of musical modernism. Contradictory impulses such as rational processes and liberation from the past in conjunction with expressivity and veneration for the past are indicative of an “ambivalent attitude towards the category of the new.”<sup>38</sup> Invented tradition provides a conceptual framework for challenging the commonly held view that modernist music resists interpretation, and its liberation from the systematic and grammatical promotes the semantic dimension of modernism.<sup>39</sup> Webern's innovations in instrumental twelve-tone composition in the String Trio (and the works that followed) deserve to be studied critically in relation to their intellectual context, a context that compels a reevaluation of the traditions of musical form.

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<sup>37</sup> See Russell West-Pavlov, “Foucault's Discursive Spaces,” in *Space in Theory: Kristeva, Foucault, Deleuze* (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2009): 143–168. See also Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sherian Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972).

<sup>38</sup> Alastair Williams, “Adorno and the Semantics of Modernism,” *Perspectives of New Music* 37/2 (1999), 33.

<sup>39</sup> See Arved Ashby, “Intention and Meaning in Modernist Music,” in *The Pleasure of Modernist Music: Listening, Meaning, Intention, Ideology*, ed. Arved Ashby (Rochester: Univ. of Rochester Press, 2004), 32–34.



APPENDIX

MATRIX OF THE ROW CLASS FOR OP. 20

3	4	8	7	2	1	9	t	5	6	e	0
2	3	7	6	1	0	8	9	4	5	t	e
t	e	3	2	9	8	4	5	0	1	6	7
e	0	4	3	t	9	5	6	1	2	7	8
4	5	9	8	3	2	t	e	6	7	0	1
5	6	t	9	4	3	e	0	7	8	1	2
9	t	2	1	8	7	3	4	e	0	5	6
8	9	1	0	7	6	2	3	t	e	4	5
1	2	6	5	0	e	7	8	3	4	9	t
0	1	5	4	e	t	6	7	2	3	8	9
7	8	0	e	6	5	1	2	9	t	3	4
6	7	e	t	5	4	0	1	8	9	2	3

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## ABSTRACT

Webern's String Trio, Op. 20, completed in 1927, marks his return to instrumental composition after over a decade of vocal writing (from Op. 12 to Op. 19), and also demonstrates his technical mastery of the twelve-tone method with which he had been experimenting during the preceding few years. In the absence of a text, Webern's compositional procedures adapted to the instrumental medium, and the two movements of the String Trio reveal formal designs deeply reminiscent of the traditions of tonal instrumental music. This essay examines the String Trio, particularly its first movement, using the trope of "invented tradition" articulated by historian Eric Hobsbawm, in order to show that those formal traditions are not simply followed, but are transformed through radically new twelve-tone relations. The symbolic function of tradition, not

mere convention, provides an orderly outline within which Webern developed new discursive practices that became part of his unique twelve-tone language. Invented tradition in the context of the String Trio not only offers insights into Webern's new discursive practices, but also into the multifaceted nature of musical modernism.

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