Speechsong
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Gould’s study of Schoenberg’s music was deeply influenced by René Leibowitz’s *Schoenberg and His School: The Contemporary State of the Language of Music*, a book which the young Gould memorized. Section one of the book is dedicated to Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, and the introduction makes reference to Heidegger’s notion of *Entwurf*, or “pro-ject,” which, Leibowitz writes, means that “by existing[,] the human body pro-jects its world, causes the world to be there.” To this sense that one is thrown into the world, one responds through *Stimmung*, a becoming attuned (in the sense of musical pitch) to one’s being in the world, which is the essence of one’s freedom.

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4 Leibowitz, *Schoenberg and His School*, xxi.

It was this engaged, processual aspect of Schoenberg’s music that Leibowitz wanted to communicate. Both a student of Schoenberg, as well as a performer of his work,\(^6\) Leibowitz’s was the first study of Schoenberg, and focused on “a rational examination of his serial procedure.”\(^7\) This focus had a significant influence on subsequent studies of Schoenberg, even though it was “contrary to Leibowitz’s intentions, for he had wanted to communicate his enthusiasm for the music of the Vienna School[,] with the analytical aspect as his means and not an end in itself.”\(^8\) But even if a misunderstanding of Leibowitz’s intentions, the notion of Schoenberg as an unremitting formalist remained, and had a deep influence on Gould, who was either blind to the political context of Schoenberg’s life and work or chose to ignore it as not relevant to Schoenberg’s music.

Another writer on Schoenberg who influenced Gould was Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno. Gould encountered Adorno via *Prisms*, originally published in 1955, which includes a laudatory essay on Schoenberg that Adorno wrote after the composer’s death. In his copy of *Prisms*, Gould highlighted Adorno’s opening comment that Schoenberg’s music demands of the listener

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\(^8\) Ibid.
“not mere contemplation but praxis,” and Gould extended this concept to his own performance/compositions. Like Leibowitz, Adorno (who studied composition with Schoenberg’s student Alban Berg) proclaimed Schoenberg the epitome of modernism in music while critiquing “mechanical” aspects of the twelve-tone system. Adorno’s vacillation about Schoenberg’s music is reflected in Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*, on which Adorno “advised” the author (appearing in the novel as “Wiesengrund”). Schoenberg also occupies a prominent place in Adorno’s *Philosophy of New Music* (1949), written when Adorno, like Schoenberg, was living in Los Angeles. Adorno asserts there that “the musical substance of Schoenberg may well one day prove superior to Wagner’s.” The context for this remark, and Adorno’s central concern in the book, is “the subsumption of music to commercialized mass production,” epitomized by popular music and jazz, although Stravinsky comes in for major criticism, in that his music is deemed by Adorno to be recidivist, rather than progressive. (The section on Schoenberg is titled “Schoenberg and Progress.”) If the modernist trend in music was a reaction to the debasement of music by the culture industry, the battle has (post WW2) been lost, Adorno implies; “calculated idiocy” now reigns via “unprincipled intellectual compliancy” in composers such as Benjamin Britten and his “pretentious meagerness,” and in Elgar’s “trumped-up fame,” all of it characterized by “a taste for bad taste” constituting a collective “rubbish heap.” “The numerically small group of connoisseurs was displaced by all those who could afford the price of a ticket and wanted to prove

13 Ibid., 3.
14 Ibid., 9–10.
to others that they were cultured”; “all that the public grasps of traditional music is its crudest aspects” as performed in “the vacuous ceremonial of the concert hall.”15 Because people’s ears have been “inundated by light music,”16 they no longer know how to listen. “Humanity in the age of omnipresent radios and gramophones has actually forgotten the experience of music,”17 a comment which Adorno would extend to all media in an essay on “The Culture Industry.”18 The implication is clear: musical culture has declined in direct proportion to the rise of electronic media, which is surely ironic in the case of both Gould and Schoenberg, since the latter’s career was inflected by the rise of recording, and the former’s became purely a product of the recording studio after 1964. Yet Adorno’s notion of a Schoenberg who was the austere manifestation of musical abstraction had a significant effect on the reception of Schoenberg’s work, much greater than that of Leibowitz. As Bojan Bujić comments, “by attributing historical inevitability to everything Schoenberg did, Adorno unwittingly made the reception of his music more difficult,”19 especially in a context in which music was increasingly mediated technologically. This was Kittler’s critique of Adorno: “Amplifiers put philosophy out of commission. They cover up traditional musical values such as thematic workmanship or polyphonic style—all these fundamentally written data—and replace them with sound.”20 To speak productively of Schoenberg, Adorno required a Medienphilosophie which his stance toward media forbade him.

A more productive understanding of Schoenberg’s music was proposed by R. Murray Schafer, a composer as well as a the-

15 Ibid., 11–12.
16 Ibid., 12.
17 Ibid., 21.
19 Bujić, Arnold Schoenberg, 123.
orizer of the soundscape, who, like Gould, came powerfully under the influence of McLuhan in the 1960s. Schafer writes in *The Tuning of the World* that there are two Greek myths that speak of the origin of music. In one of these, Athena is said to have created a *nomos* — a melody used by the singers of epic — in honor of the sisters of Medusa, whose mourned the beheading of their sibling. In the other, Hermes is said to have invented the lyre when he realized that the shell of a turtle was resonant. As Schafer comments, “[i]n the first of these myths music arises as subjective emotion; in the second it arises with the discovery of sonic properties in the materials of the universe.”21 While the first myth represents music as Dionysian, the secondarticulates it as Apollonian, and it is this understanding of music that Schafer associates with Schoenberg: “[i]n the Apollonian view music is exact, serene, mathematical, associated with transcendental visions of Utopia and the Harmony of Spheres. […] It is the basis of Pythagoras’s speculations and those of the medieval theoreticians (where music was taught as a subject of the quadrivium, along with arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy), as well as Schoenberg’s twelve-note method of composition. Its methods of exposition are number theories. It seeks to harmonize the world through acoustic design.”22 This serves to contextualize Schoenberg’s musical and political aspirations in a way that Adorno, with his exclusive focus on musical “progress,” fails to do, although Schoenberg more accurately acceded to Nietzsche’s exhortation to worship at the alter of both Apollo and Dionysus.

22 Ibid. Gould has been studied as an “Apollonian” artist in a famous profile by Joseph Roddy with that title, published in *The New Yorker*, May 14, 1960. “Schönberg” is mentioned once, as representative of “the tone-row systematizers” (74). Roddy notes that H.H. Stuckenschmidt, the biographer of Schoenberg and “Germany’s most respected music critic,” called Gould “the greatest pianist since Ferruccio Busoni” (89) after hearing him perform with Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic.