

## Old Ideas in New Contexts: The Presence and (re)Interpretation of Tonal Archetypes in 20th-century Music

### Introduction

From the modernist (neoclassical or other) music of the early twentieth century to the avant-garde and the post-modernist music after 1945 the tonal tradition acts as an endless repository of compositional ideas. The present paper first examines the manifestation of a variety of tonal elements which have an archetypal function within the tonal tradition (from harmonic vocabulary to harmonic motions and formal moulds) in post-tonal and atonal contexts. The focus is on the semantic incongruities that their presence within the new context arises, and their dialogue, interaction or symbiosis with the non-tonal elements. Moreover, discussion will also critically focus on analytical readings of post-tonal contexts against the normative and ‘self-contained’ functions of tonality; in other words, in readings in which tonal elements or concepts provide analytical tools for the problem of apprehending structure in post-tonal and atonal environments.

### Tonal archetypal elements in new contexts

#### *The triad in post-tonal or atonal contexts*

The triad, an archetypal element in the tradition of tonality, found a place in the music of the twentieth century. Although, in most cases, the focus is on what was considered new and tonally deviative at the time of the composition of this music, the triad unequivocally remains an aurally recognizable and familiar element of the musical surface. However, there is a great difference in its presence in the new contexts. In tonal music, the triad is “both the prevailing sonority of the musical surface and the background generator of the entire pitch structure” (Straus 1990: 74). On the other hand, as Joseph Straus has pointed out: “Twentieth-century composers enmesh the most characteristic and fundamental sonority of common-practice music in a new network of structural relations ... striving to neutralize its tonal implications and to redefine it within a post-tonal context” (Straus 1990: 74).

In many cases the unorthodox presence of the triad essentially seems to underline the distance of the present to the past. Much of the irony that many commentators locate in Igor Stravinsky’s ‘neoclassical’ music derives from the unorthodox presence of the triad. Richard Taruskin, for example, mentions that in the first theme of the Octet the triad on *D* is given emphasis from the very opening; however, the theme ends with the normally unstable, in tonal terms, second inversion of the triad at the end of bar 14 (Taruskin 2005: 483–485). Another example is given from the *Serenade in A* for piano. The piece opens with an F major triad in first inversion (see Example 1a). It is rather the melodic emphasis on *A* that hints at its priority, while the triad on *A* is highlighted by being the final outcome of the first phrase in bar 6. However, the absence of clear-cut traditional cadences thereafter thwarts any traditional tonal expectations. Moreover, the final endings of all the movements on the note *A* confirm the priority of this single note and not of the triad. It is interesting to mention that the sense of stability at these endings is mainly the outcome of the abrupt textural dissolution, thus of non-pitch parameters (see Example 1b).

Example 1a. Igor Stravinsky, *Serenade in A*, Hymn, Bars 1–6

Maestoso ♩ = 58

Example 1b. Igor Stravinsky, *Serenade in A*, the end of Rondoletto

♩ = 125

However, since the triad is the most stable sonority of the tonal system, its presence in alien contexts carries with it this association. Edward T. Cone has pointed out in an early but remarkably penetrating critical discussion on the issue of tonal references in non-tonal environments (in the article ‘Beyond Analysis’ of 1967), these references function “not so much syntactically as associatively, bringing with them implications of the orientational and expressive values inhering in tonal contexts” (Cone 1989: 71). Straus, focusing on the use of the triad in such environments, underlines that it “retains its sonorous identity but not its structural power” (Straus 1990: 75); thus it can act “as a point of repose” and retaining “its sense of stability and rootedness but is otherwise stripped of its traditional function” (Straus 1990: 76–77).

In the following three examples the triad seems to offer an aurally recognizable point of stability at important junctures of the structure. In Debussy’s *L’Isle joyeuse* the opening material is drawn from the whole-tone scale that includes A, while the same scale recurs as a stable resource throughout the piece. However, at the beginning of the first theme the A major triad provides the stability of a solid start of the thematic argument, while the same triad is given emphasis at important formal places throughout the piece and at the very end, disregarding the prevalent modal environment. Arnold Whittall has made an interesting observation regarding the dialogue of the new with the old in the large-scale unfolding of the piece: “most of the triadic centres emphasized in the piece are themselves related whole-tonally rather than tonally” (they belong to the same whole-tone scale) (Whittall 1975: 78).

The second example is Arthur Honegger’s *Hommage à Albert Roussel*. Here the constructive principle is non-tonal since the melodic presentation of the name of Roussel (see the upper voice in bars 1–4 in Example 2a), which is first heard on its original pitch and then on various transpositions as a melodic ostinato, does not yield any explicit tonal implication. Despite the harmonization of the first two notes of the second presentation of the ostinato as a D major triad (bar 5), this triad does not acquire any focus in tonal terms throughout the piece. However, it gains emphasis at the last nine bars. Here the D major triad provides a point of repose by its very nature (which contrasts the preponderance of more complicated sonorities in the piece). Moreover, there is a strong sense of a dialogue of the non-tonal constructive principle with tonal functions: the sense of stability is locally enhanced in tonal terms because the first eight first components of the ostinato melody are functionally absorbed within a D tonal environment (see, for example, the II–V–I motions in bars 44–48, Example 2b).

The third example demonstrates the presence of the triad in twelve-note contexts. At the end of a twelve-note piece by the Greek composer Yannis Papaioannou (see Example 3), the F# major triad, which is embedded into the series, enhances the cadential sense which is also gesturally created by the left hand repetition. In this case the twelve-note segment acquires an additional ‘tonal’ meaning, which is crucial in the aural understanding of the notion of closure.<sup>1</sup>

**Example 2a.** Arthur Honegger, *Hommage à Albert Roussel*, Bars 1–5

**Example 2b.** Arthur Honegger, *Hommage à Albert Roussel*, Bars 40–48

**Example 3.** Yannis A. Papaioannou, *Invention III*, Bars 18ii–20; Triadic ending

<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that a major triad has not been highlighted elsewhere in the movement.

*The perfect fifth in post-tonal and atonal contexts*

The perfect fifth is a structural component of the triad and also of the theory and practice of tonality in general. While the problem of succession and continuity in twentieth-century music has been underlined by many commentators, perfect-fifth motions, an archetypal element of progression in the tonal tradition, often acts as a local mediator of the sense of direction in post-tonal contexts. A representative example is given by the ubiquity of the perfect fifth as the interval of the entries of the fugal subject in pairs throughout the second movement of the Michael Tippett's *Quartet No. 2*, which is a 'fugue'. The subject starts with C# and the 'answer' with F# at the expositions at the opening and also at the end, making overt reference to the formal archetype of the tonal fugue. The entries of the subject in pairs throughout the movement also follow this archetypal pattern, providing a local sense of progression (see Example 4) (Puffett 1986: 240). However, as Derryck Puffett's close analysis of this movement has wonderfully shown, these motions do not suffice for a unified analytical perception of the movement in tonal terms (Puffett 1986: 257, 260–261).

**Example 4.** Michael Tippett, *Quartet No 2*, Fugal entries (reproduced by Puffett 1986: 240)

Exposition Entries	C# – F# (twice)
Middle Entries	E – A (twice)
Final Entries	C# – F#

In other instances, the perfect fifth is part of a fruitful dialogue between the collective tradition and the contextual present. At the opening 'fugue' of Bartók's *Music for Strings, Piano and Celesta* the second entry of the subject is heard a perfect fifth above the first, while the third voice enters a perfect fifth below the first. Thereafter, this pattern is further developed as shown in Example 5: the entries are heard at successive perfect fifths alternately above and below the original entry up to bar 27. Thus, although in this piece there is an unmistakable reference to the archetypal subject-answer pattern, this pattern essentially participates in the contextually established priority of the concept of symmetry, since the first entry acts as an axis of symmetry for the later ones.<sup>2</sup>

**Example 5.** Béla Bartók, *Music for Strings, Piano and Celesta*, Fugal entries up to bar 27

	E	B	F#
A			
	D	G	C

**Hierarchy as a compositional archetype in post-tonal and atonal contexts**

In the above-mentioned fugue by Tippett, the reappearance at the end of the pair of entries on the opening pitch level implies the priority of F#, which is fulfilled by the final ending on an F# minor triad. The key signature of the F# minor gives further evidence for this compositional intention. Thus, although the sense of large-scale hierarchy is not created by the normative functions of tonality, there is an overtly expressed in notational and musical means compositional intention for a hierarchical distinction of pitches. As Perle, Lansky and Headlam (2001) point out in the entry on atonality in *New Grove Dictionary*, the hierarchic superiority of certain pitches or pitch configurations in post tonal environments testifies that "the concept of a musical language as inferred from tonality extends deeply into atonality and forms a significant basis for the development of new ideas".

The following statement by Anton Webern (1963: 54) is, I believe, totally representative of the archetypal function of tonal hierarchy in his twelve-note music:

The original form and pitch of the row occupy a position akin to that of the 'main key' in earlier music; the recapitulation will naturally return to it. We end 'in the same key!' This analogy with earlier formal constructions is quite consciously fostered; here we find the path that will lead us again to extended forms.

Indeed, as shown by Kathryn Bailey (1991), the serial reprise plays, in many cases, an important role in the delimitation of the large-scale form in Webern's twelve-note music. Some of the early twelve-note

<sup>2</sup> As shown by many commentators the concept of symmetry is central in the understanding of this music in many levels: harmonic vocabulary, large scale harmonic scheme, formal unfolding (see, for example, Lansky / Perle / Headlam 2001 and Wilson 1992: 29–32).

**Example 6.** Igor Stravinsky, *Octet, I*, Tonal Centers in Exposition and Recapitulation

Exposition		Recapitulation	
1 <sup>st</sup> Theme	2 <sup>nd</sup> Theme	2 <sup>nd</sup> Theme	1 <sup>st</sup> Theme
E <sub>b</sub>	–	E	E <sub>b</sub>
	D	–	
	semitone	semitone	

music of Schoenberg demonstrates similar ideas, while in his later music the priority is given to the first pair of hexachordally combinatorial series.<sup>3</sup> The same idea is met in the serial music of Stravinsky<sup>4</sup> and is transformed in the serial music of Nikos Skalkotas, a pupil of Schoenberg. In Skalkotas's serial music the referential configuration of pitches is a complex of twelve-note series which are presented by parallel contrapuntal melodies (Mantzourani 2001).

While Webern, Schoenberg, Skalkottas and Stravinsky assigned a superior position in the pitch place to the initial transpositional level of the twelve-note series, many composers gave this position to single pitches. For example, as discussed above, in Stravinsky's *Serenade in A* the announcement of the priority of A by the title is literally confirmed by the emphasis on this single pitch at the end of all four movements. Written testimonies of the intention for providing a superior hierarchical status to certain pitches are given by many composers in the description of their own music. For example, describing the first movement of his Fifth Quartet, Bartók states: "The first theme has two principal degrees: Bb (tonic) and E (dominant like); the beginning, middle part and end of the movement produce the following tonalities: Bb, E and Bb" (reproduced in Wilson 1992: 37). Although the use of the term 'tonalities' by Bartók is not to be taken without speculation, pitch class centrality is one of the means by which he and other composers of the twentieth-century used in order to reinterpret the archetypal closed forms of the tonal tradition.

**Reinterpretations of sonata form**

One of the most paradoxical uses of the forms of tonal tradition in the twentieth century is by Berg in his operas *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*. Discussing the motivation for the use of these forms especially in *Wozzeck*, Perle mentions the following: "Berg offered as the *raison d'être* of this novel conception of operatic design not general principles but the special problem of basing an opera on a selection from twenty-six loosely constructed, partly fragmentary scenes by Büchner" (Perle 1980b: 68). Thus in this instance Berg seems to rely on the familiarity of the listener with the narrative process of the closed forms of tonal tradition, as a means of providing formal articulation in the overall structure of a fragmentary text.

*Reinterpretation of the form in twelve-note contexts*

The expectations of the listener by the traditional formal model and the playing with these expectations are the focus in the twentieth-century compositional reinterpretations of sonata form.<sup>5</sup> A characteristic example of this playing is provided by the reinterpretations of the form with twelve-note means, in which the second theme appears a perfect fifth above the first. Such is the case, for example, in Schoenberg's *Klavierstück* Op. 33a (Perle 1962: 125–129), Webern's Trio Op. 20 second movement (Bailey 1991: 154–163), and the large-scale application of the formal scheme in the overall formal structure of Skalkotas's Third Piano Concerto (Mantzourani 1999: 138–142). Although the compositional intention to provide an analogy with tonal sonata is quite evident in these cases, the efficacy of this scheme has been seriously questioned by many commentators.<sup>6</sup> The focus of this questioning is on the relationship or not of this large-scale perfect-fifth motion to the structural elements of each composition, since the twelve-note music is from its very nature contextual. In fact, much of the analytical work on twelve-note music, which is impossible to review here, has developed methodologies in order to show the integration of compositional detail (derived

<sup>3</sup> Ethan Haimo states that: "In the mature twelve-note works Schoenberg tends to treat the opening IH-combinatorial complex [the inversionally and hexachordally related complex] as a referential region, a kind of metaphor for the tonic in tonal composition" (Haimo 1990: 29).

<sup>4</sup> Straus (2001: 10) states that "Stravinsky accepted from the outset the Schoenbergian idea that four members of the series-class ... might function as a referential norm, somewhat in the manner of a tonic region in a tonal composition".

<sup>5</sup> Silvina Milstein (1992: 17) notes for Schoenberg: "The fusion of the twelve-note method with Baroque and Classical forms furnishes a composition with a repertoire of fixed relations existing prior to the particular composition, thus providing a more stable context of reference and expectation than that which existed in the atonal works".

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Webster 2001.

from the series) with large-scale formal structure (see, for example, Hyde 1982 for Schoenberg's music and Mead 1993 for Webern's). An early example of this attitude is given by Perle's analysis of Schoenberg's Op. 33a in his book *Serial Composition and Atonality*. Perle (1962: 125) suggests that the transpositional scheme of the piece, which gives emphasis to the perfect fifth in the second thematic area, is an expansion of the initial three-note unit of the series, which includes two consecutive perfect fifths (Bb–F–C).

Other compositional devices used in order to recreate the functional differentiations between the sections of the archetypal form by twelve-note means include: the use of different series or different segmentation of the series for each thematic section and in the development. With great differences in compositional application these devices are met in the twelve-note music of Schoenberg, Webern, Skalkotas and others.

#### *The role of large-scale symmetry*

The tonal traditions of the sonata form are based on the polarity of the two thematic areas, either in tonal terms (in the 18th-century tradition) or in character (in the 19th-century tradition). The recapitulation, especially in the 18th-century tradition, acts as a large-scale resolution of this polarity, while the resolution is transferred, in many cases, near the end in the romantic tradition (Webster 2001). As shown by Straus and other commentators, this dynamic and directional aspect of the form in its twentieth-century recreation often gives way to the concept of large-scale symmetry. The form thus becomes rather circular and static since the recapitulation often acts as a large-scale counterpart of the exposition (Straus 2001: 128). This idea is met not only in Schoenberg's late twelve-note works in which inversionally combinatorial series govern the moment-to-moment unfolding of the musical surface, but also in the reinterpretation of the sonata form by Stravinsky and Bartók. For example, in the first movements of Stravinsky's Octet and Bartók's Quartet No 5 the recapitulation of themes in reverse order is only one aspect of the large-scale symmetry. As shown in example 6, in the Octet the upward semitonal motion between the centric notes of the two themes in the exposition are 'counterbalanced' by the downward semitonal motion towards the overall centric note of Eb in the reversed recapitulation (Straus 2001: 103–106). A similar instance, now with Bb as center, is seen in Bartók's Quartet (Rosen 1988: 403–408).

### **Tonality as an archetype in the analytical understanding of twentieth-century music**

#### *Centric notes*

Despite the unequivocal compositional intention of composers such as Bartók and Stravinsky to provide hierarchical priority to particular pitches, the actual location of these pitches in the musical surface is itself an analytical interpretation not without multiple results. However, there is a relative consensus on the basic methodological assumption of this interpretation: the priority of these pitches is the result of quantitative and not qualitative emphasis. In other words, as summarized by Perle for the presence of centric pitches in the atonal sections of *Wozzeck*, a centric pitch is established through "its exposed position in the melodic contour (highest and lowest note), its exposed temporal position (last note), repetition and temporal preponderance" (Perle 1980a: 131).

#### *Locating hierarchy*

Beyond the location of emphasis on single notes, the transformation of the concept of hierarchy has been a stimulating idea in much analytical thinking in post-tonal music. Tonal hierarchy generates the sense of stability and instability which in turn generates the unfolding of the overall form; analogous functions are assigned by analyses of post-tonal music to pitch constructs which do not belong to the tonal vocabulary and are contextually emphasized. Taruskin, for example, gave a new light to the analytical understanding of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, far beyond the famous opening bitonal structure. The outcome of his analysis centres on the hierarchical superiority of octatonic collection III in Toorn's nomenclature (Toorn 1983): "In the end, the best one can do, in answer to the question 'What is the key of *Petrushka*?' is to say 'Collection III'. It is more than a collection, though: if key means anything at all, then in this ballet it is a key; for it governs a hierarchy of pitches – contextually established, to be sure, but eminently consistent and regular ... In *Petrushka*, Collection III is a point of harmonic reference from which departures and to which returns are effected by a variety of clearly articulated techniques" (Taruskin 1990: 91–92). However, it is noteworthy that one of these techniques is not contextual but a fundamental function of tonality which is taken for granted: that of the leading note – i.e. semitonal voice-leading as providing local direction towards a hierarchically superior pitch. The same observation can be made for analytical endeavours to the music of Bartók, which, however, offer a stimulating interpretation of the concept of hierarchy in his music (e.g. Wilson 1992).

### *New 'normative' concepts*

The recognition of the importance of symmetry in twentieth-century music prompted the theorization of the concept in an attempt to provide analytical tools common in the understanding of music from a wide array of styles (e.g. by Berg, Stravinsky, Bartók, etc). Thus the 'diminished seventh' chord in tonal terms (a symmetrical construction), can be shown to act as a common structural element between immensely diverse music such as Bartók's *Music for Strings, Piano and Celesta* and Varèse's *Density 21:5* (Perle / Lansky / Headlam 2001). Another stimulating concept is the axis of symmetry. This is based on the idea that every pitch or set of pitches can be seen to have its / their counterpart(s) around a pitch or set of pitches (e.g. D is the axis of symmetry of C and E). Although this concept is admittedly abstract, it permits the theoretical organization of the twelve-note pitch space, allowing an identification of common aspects of symmetry between different works. As regards the role of symmetry in the functional differentiation of sections within the same work, Headlam states: "Where it occurs, symmetry is thus in a constant state of interruption and regeneration, tension and release, somewhat analogously to tonal stability and instability by motion away from and back to a tonic key" (Perle / Lansky / Headlam 2001). Although this statement refers to the whole array of symmetrical functions, as regards especially the axis of symmetry I would like to mention that I find more convincing and close to the aural experience of music the analyses in which the actual notes that represent important axes of symmetry are projected by the musical surface and they do not function only as an abstract referential element (e.g. Straus 2001).

### *Transforming the Schenkerian archetype*

The Schenkerian Fundamental Structure (*Ursatz*) and its graphic presentation (on different structural levels) of the organic relationship of the harmonic surface with an archetypal tonal background structure intrigued the analytical thought on post-tonal music. A pioneer in this stream of thought was Felix Salzer. Salzer introduced the idea of Contrapunctal Structural chords, sonorities which are contextually assigned significance and they are important in the large-scale elaboration of the 'tonic' (through semitonal voice-leading motion) (Salzer 1962: 160–162). However, later analysts have persuasively discussed in detail the problem of prolongation in post-tonal environments; in other words the inability of this thinking to provide an understanding of how every single aspect of the musical surface is functionally connected to an unequivocal hierarchical process in which the structural pitch configurations are prolonged (Straus 1987). Thus the idea of 'association' between contextually asserted structural points in the place of the idea of prolongation has given a widely accepted model for the understanding of long-range relationships in post-tonal contexts (Straus 1987, Wilson 1992).

### **Epilogue**

With the rise of pop tonal / modal culture as a major component of our everyday perception of music and the domination of classical tonal repertoire in the concert-hall, tonal elements surely have not lost their central place in our musical experience. Thus, consciously or unconsciously we still apply aspects of our tonal hearing in listening to twentieth-century music, much in the way that the composers of the twentieth century could not escape from a basic element of their musical studies.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as shown by the above condensed reference to the analytical thinking on this music, the tonal system still inspires the search of a method of understanding the common features that may underpin the stylistically diverse twentieth-century music in providing a general plateau of precompositional functions, like in tonality. However, the power and success of these readings resides actually, I think, on how they relate to the way one listens to this music. In this respect, it is crucial to underline that the listener has in some way to be alert of this deep connection in order to activate his / her hearing with a specific understanding. And it is actually here that the problem begins: firstly because of the stylistic diversity of this music, secondly because in many cases the analytical explanations concern a really small part of the perceived musical surface, and thirdly because, in most cases, the common plateau resides in abstract concepts (such as symmetry) and not in real acoustical facts.

<sup>7</sup> See Straus 2001 for an interesting reading of the relationship of the twentieth-century composers with their tonal past against the idea of the 'anxiety of influence' by Harold Bloom.

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### Santrauka

#### Senosios idėjos naujuose kontekstuose: archetipų naudojimas ir naujas interpretavimas XX a. Europos muzikoje

Didžiausią įtaką tam, kaip klausytojas girdi ar suvokia muziką, pradedant ankstyvojo XX a. moderniaja (neoklasicistine ar kita) ir baigiant pokario laikų avangardistine, turi senųjų archetipinių elementų panaudojimas. Šis aspektas tampa dar svarbesnis muzikoje, kurioje tokie elementai naudojami siekiant perteikti konkrečią vietovę ar pabrėžti nacionalinį identitetą. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamos tokių elementų, kilusių iš skirtingų tradicijų, apraiškos stilistiškai įvairialypėje XX a. muzikoje. Straipsnio tikslas – iširti, kaip šie archetipiniai elementai koegzistuoja ir sąveikauja su naujais originaliais elementais, kurie turi esminės įtakos naujai terpei formuoti. Kitaip tariant, aptarti semantiniai nesuderinamumai, kuriuos sukelia šių elementų sugretinimas.

Nagrinėjami šie iš skirtingų tradicijų kilę archetipiniai elementai: sonatos forma ir naujas jos interpretavimas naudojant tonalias ir atonalias priemones (pvz., Stravinskio, Bartóko, Schönbergo, Bergo ir Skalkotto kūrinuose); mažorinis arba minorinis trigarsis atonaliuose kontekstuose; grynujų kvintų santykiai netonaliosios muzikos mikro- ir makro- struktūrose (pvz., nustatantys antrosios teminės medžiagos dvylikatonės sonatos formoje arba atsakymo fugoje transponavimo lygmenį modalinėje terpėje); teminiai pasikartojimai ir teminio plėtojimo nebuvimas (archetipinis reiškinytis liaudies muzikavimo tradicijoje)

muzikoje, kurioje naudojama folkloro medžiaga (pvz., graikų kompozitoriaus Yanno Konstantinidi kūryboje); plagalinės kadencijos graikų kompozitorių muzikoje, kurioje naudojamos bizantinės dermės (tai gali būti laikoma archetipinio kadencinio proceso, būdingo Vakarų muzikai, perkėlimu į kitokią garso aukščio terpę); ir melodinė padidintoji sekunda (archetipinis intervalas, būdingas rytietiška laikomai graikų muzikos pakraipai).

Siūloma įvertinti ir impulsą, skatinantį minėtų elementų naudojimą ir funkcionavimą naujose terpėse kaip ideologinio klimato, kurio produktas jie ir yra, išraišką. Taigi, pvz., plagalines kadencijas bizantinės muzikos derminėse terpėse galima laikyti apibendrintu siekiu suvakarietinti to laikotarpio Graikijos muziką, o platų kvintų santykių naudojimą naujame Skalkotto sonatos formos serijinio pobūdžio interpretavime galima vertinti kaip tradicinių formų modelių laikymąsi, taip pat kaip ideologinio Vienos naujosios mokyklos reikalavimo – organicistinio požiūrio į istoriją – išraišką.