

# Surmising the Compulsions of Creativity

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## Abstract:

Undergraduate theory texts and coursework have traditionally been focused on concepts that create form, harmonic and melodic language, unusual features and temporal organization in tonal, and more recently, atonal music. Understandably, and perhaps due to space restrictions, emphasis has been placed almost entirely on empirical topics of structural significance within those criteria. By way of an example taken from the third movement of Anton Webern's Op. 5 string quartet, the author illustrates the need and value of straying from the empirical and chancing conjecture while analyzing compositions influenced by composers' enigmatic game-like constructs.

Undergraduate theory texts and coursework have traditionally been focused on concepts that create form, harmonic and melodic language, unusual features and temporal organization. Although tonal music is the primary subject, atonal topics are more commonplace of late and have received treatments in a number of text—sJohn Rahn's *Basic Atonal Theory*, Joseph Straus's *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, Ralph Turek's *The Elements of Music Volume II*, Stephen Kostka's *Materials and Techniques of Twentieth Century Music*, and Jane Clendinning and Elizabeth Marvin's *Theory and Analysis*, to name a few. However—perhaps because they are rather mysterious, unquantifiable and usually unverifiable—the creative games and goals that inspire recondite compositional choices are rarely explored. As instructors, we often point out the results of procedures, but rarely do we ask ourselves or our students why individual compositional choices may have been preferred over others.<sup>1</sup> Which choices might have been dismissed and why?

<sup>1</sup>Reginald Smith Brindle attempts to divine Webern's line of thought during his composition of *Six Bagatelles for String Quartet Op. 9. Serial Composition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 182-185.