Negotiating Ambiguity: Dynamic Structure in Schoenberg Songs

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Introduction
Schoenberg’s Erwartung (1914) and his later works, such as Gurre-Lieder (1911) and Pierrot Lunaire (1912), are examples of music that challenges traditional forms and structures. This study explores how listeners perceive the form and structure of Schoenberg’s Songs of 1908.

Method
Case Study
Songs IV and V were performed by a singer (S) on four occasions, each time with a different conductor and pianist, and recorded on a reel-to-reel tape. After each performance, S submitted a written analysis of the performance, including a series of questions for the listener. The analysis was then transcribed and the audio recordings were listened to, allowing for a more detailed understanding of the performance and the listener’s perception of the form.

Song IV Study
1. Participants were asked to identify the boundaries of the sections and to rate their confidence in their judgments.
2. The participants were asked to identify the boundaries of the sections and to rate their confidence in their judgments.

Song V Study
1. Participants were asked to identify the boundaries of the sections and to rate their confidence in their judgments.
2. The participants were asked to identify the boundaries of the sections and to rate their confidence in their judgments.

Case Study Results: Elle’s Perception of Form in Song IV
A section remains constant over the four rehearsals.

Case Study Results: Elle’s Perception of Form in Song V
A section remains constant over the four rehearsals.

Discussion
The perceived ambiguity of Schoenberg’s songs is a result of the listener’s ability to interpret and understand the music. The listener’s perception of the form is influenced by the conductor’s interpretation and the pianist’s performance. The listener’s perception of the form is also influenced by their prior knowledge of Schoenberg’s style and their familiarity with the song.

Conclusions
The perception of form in Schoenberg’s songs is a result of the listener’s ability to interpret and understand the music. The listener’s perception of the form is influenced by the conductor’s interpretation and the pianist’s performance. The listener’s perception of the form is also influenced by their prior knowledge of Schoenberg’s style and their familiarity with the song.

References

"Not only is it more accurate to refer to music’s structures, but the origin and dynamic nature of those structures must be acknowledged."

-Rink et al., 2011, p.298