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"Feel the Emptiness": Micro-Schemata in the Music of Henryk Mikołaj Górecki*

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ABSTRACT: When filming a documentary about his Third Symphony, Henryk Mikołaj Górecki insisted on filming on the grounds of Auschwitz concentration camp, saying "To understand me and my symphony, we must go there. . . . my symphony is not about Auschwitz. . . . But look around you. Feel the emptiness." In an effort to musically illustrate Górecki's "emptiness," this article argues that Górecki's music shares a few key threads, despite being written over a six-decade period and in styles ranging from Polish sonorism to repetitive tonality. Considering musical aspects that remained the same, as opposed to those that changed, can offer powerful insights about the composer's stylistic evolution. This paper introduces the term "micro-schemata" and applies it to the first corpus study of Górecki's oeuvre. Micro-schemata are defined as distinct but flexible stock musical concepts that recur as basic particles of Górecki's music. I have observed that 85.2% of Górecki's works with available scores—including all major works—use the micro-schemata outlined in this study. Each micro-schema can be viewed in a progression spanning the composer's three main stylistic periods: the "geometric period," romantic modality, and tonal sparsity. Alternatively, we can focus on the fixed micro-schemata, which remain constant while the context changes.

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Introduction

[0.1] Henryk Mikołaj Górecki's music shares a few key threads, despite the composer writing over a six-decade period and in styles ranging from Polish sonorism to repetitive tonality. These threads contribute to Górecki's distinct compositional voice.(1) Adrian Thomas (1997b)> outlines three main strands in Górecki's music that define this compositional voice: folk song influences, iconographic citations, and dynamic/expressive extremes. While Górecki's music certainly does employ these characteristics, and Thomas provides sufficient evidence for each, they are far from unique to Górecki. With these accurate-but-broad generalizations, Górecki's compositional voice as it pertains to his entire career, not just a few pieces, remains undefined. For a composer versed in such a wide range of compositional styles, the ability to trace what is consistent across highly varied music proves to be an interesting theoretical issue.

[0.2] In *Music and Memory*, Bob Snyder proposes that schemas "serve as frameworks for memory, increase chunkability, and help us form representations in long-term memory" (2001, 101). According to Gjerdingen's seminal book *Music in the Galant Style*, a schema can be described as a "stock musical phrase" used by the galant-style composers in their music as building blocks (2007, 6). To apply the larger picture of Snyder and Gjerdingen's work to Górecki's music, some specific adjustments are necessary. Given the generally sparse textures of Górecki's music (not to mention a frequent lack of tonal center), schemata cannot be identified in Górecki's music using the same musical features as in galant music. Additionally, Gjerdingen's schemata are "event schemata," which have "determinable beginning and ending points" (1988, 61), but the intense repetitiveness of Górecki's music does not allow for the consistent definition of such temporal designations. Instead, I define micro-schemata as distinct but flexible stock musical concepts that recur as basic particles of Górecki's music. A micro-schema does not have to be an event schema. The word "concept" is chosen to encompass musical features as small and varied as three-note motives, specific harmonies, or particular voicings, all of which are "micro" characteristics for many works but assume larger roles in the empty and repetitive soundscapes of Górecki. In the examination of micro-schemata, this article argues that Górecki's compositional style remained consistent in a few small facets across his career. Similarities between the early serialism and the late tonal works can be found when examining these micro-schemata. These few key threads define the "Górecki sound" in precise terms and outline how the composer's style revolved around these commonalities.(2)

[0.3] It is natural to view works by a sole composer in a chronology, and Górecki's music can be neatly placed in three chronological categories: the "geometric period"(as termed by Danuta Mirka, 2004), romantic modality, and sparse tonality.(3) True to his Polish experimental roots, Górecki's early works use serialism (as in the First Symphony [1959] and *Scontri* [1960]), Polish sonorism (*Genesis* [1962–63]), and reductive constructivism (*Old Polish Music* [1969]). Despite these varied compositional techniques, Mirka has shown that this period shares a consistent interest in musical geometry, involving physical organization of performance space, geometrical aspects of the printed score itself, and various musical representations of geometry (2004).(4) Maintaining the large orchestral sound of the early works, Górecki's middle period instead takes on a lush, romantic character, as in the Second Symphony (1972), the Third Symphony (1976), and *Beatus Vir* (1979). Lastly, Górecki's later works evoke the stereotypical "holy minimalist" sound, moving further still from his avant-garde roots, and acquiring a deep sense of emptiness and sparsity, as in *Totus Tuus* (1987), *Good Night* (1990), and a large amount of chamber music (art song, string quartets, and other small ensembles). Spanning these divergent styles, micro-schemata can serve as the grounding, invariant factor from which we hear Górecki's music in a holistic, yet musically specific sense.

[0.4] Górecki has consistently been labeled a "holy minimalist," alongside Arvo Pärt and John Tavener (Fisk 1994; Teachout 1995; Rutherford-Johnson 2017). This term describes music with a certain simplicity reminiscent of spiritual or religious works.(5) Some have taken issue with this genre labeling; Tim Rutherford-Johnson (2017, 25) describes the term as a "critic's invention" and a "branding convenience." Kerry O'Brien and William Robin (2023, 307) point out that unlike the American minimalists, the "holy minimalists" did not know each other until record labels brought them together. The Third Symphony (1976), *Three Pieces in Olden Style* (1963), *Miserere* (1981), and *Totus Tuus* (1987) are among record labels' favorite Górecki works because of their marketability as "holy minimalism," though only a handful of other works by Górecki—if any—fit neatly into this commercial category. Album cover photos also impose a spiritual or Holocaust-oriented view of Górecki's music, even if the music is entirely unrelated to the topic implied. While examining the micro-schemata in Górecki's music, we find that the select few works characterized as "holy minimalist" are not in a category of their own, but rather function under the same basic parameters and are in dialogue with the rest of Górecki's compositions.

1. Background

[1.1] Górecki's life and career has been outlined in scholarly literature with great detail. Adrian Thomas's *Górecki* (1997a) sets the cultural, societal, and personal stage for Górecki's compositions. Thomas explains the ramifications of Górecki's youthful fascination with Chopin and Beethoven, his largely self-taught keyboard and composition skills, frequent rejection from music schools, and, perhaps most importantly, the death of his mother was only two years old.(6) The history of Górecki's most famous work, the Third Symphony, has been described in depth by Luke Howard in several publications (1998, 2003, 2007). Maria Cizmic (2012, 97–166)

has discussed trauma and mourning in Górecki's Third Symphony, asking whether the piece portrays a universal or a localized experience of grief. These historical considerations are key to understanding the progression of Górecki's style from one of the Polish experimentalists to the purported "holy minimalism."

[1.2] Thomas (1997b) describes three main strands key to Górecki's music. The first of Thomas's strands is the influence of folk song in Górecki's music. The opening double bass lament from the Third Symphony, for example, has been traced to the Lenten Beggar's song "Lo, Jesus is Dying" and the hymn "Let Him be Praised" (Thomas 1997b, 84–85). Folk melodies can also be heard in many of Górecki's art songs, and in his motto motif, which I will discuss later. The next strand is Górecki's iconographic citations and quotations, founded in his study of Romantic composers. The opening of the Third Symphony's third movement features an oscillation between the first two chords of Chopin's Mazurka in A minor, op. 17, no. 4,(7) and a few bars later a lone E♮ entering above the oscillation, a reference to the first movement (mm. 280–84) of Beethoven's Eroica.(8) Finally, Górecki's preference for dynamic and expressive extremes occurs across many places in his music, such as the first tempo marking in *Beatus Vir* (1979): "Moderato marcattissimo, ma ben tenuto, con massima passione, con massima expressione, con grande tensione, quasi aggressivo."

[1.3] These concepts are undoubtedly relevant to Górecki, but these same three strands can be found in the music of a great many composers. Bartók is famous for his use of folk song, polystylists and composers of collage music inherently pull from outside sources and historical references, and countless composers have been noted for extremes in their music (see Galina Ustvolskaya's sonatas for piano, where a dynamic marking below *fortissimo* is a rarity [Cizmic 2012, 67–96]). Because of the non-specificity of these strands, it would be easy to apply the three strands to most composers of the twentieth century, or to even older composers. But in addition to noting these familiar attributes, the examination of specific patterns, even if they are quite small, will elucidate the characteristic aspects of Górecki's music.

[1.4] For instance, roughly twenty-five minutes of the first movement of the Third Symphony (a half-hour movement) is based on one repeated melody. While this feature has contributed to many harsh critiques of the symphony, it shows Górecki's inclination to manipulate small musical details.(9) The string section is split into ten parts, and starting with the second double basses, the long, slow, completely diatonic melody is played in its entirety. After each subsequent repeat, the next-lowest section plays the melody transposed up a diatonic fifth and offset by one measure (see **Example 1**). Cizmic talks about the experience of hearing the resulting counterpoint (2012, 144); when the second double basses reach the climax of their melody (m. 37, climaxes shown by red carets), the first double basses are about to reach theirs. The melody unfolds in such a way that the second-double-bass climax produces a vertical major second with the first double bass, a tight, cramped interval, whereas the first-double-bass climax (m. 38) produces a vertical major seventh, a larger but still harsh dissonance. Similar relationships occur at each line's climax, compounding with each instrument, forcing the listener to hear the melodic climax many times in a row as if the grief is inescapable, always increasing in intensity with each new instrument. Expanding on Cizmic's analysis, I would add that the climax is not the only moment that a listener is forced to hear many times in a row. Many phrases in the melody end on scale-degree 2 of the local key (circled in green), which may resonate with a listener each time an instrument reaches that moment; the seventeenth bar (relative to the starting point of the melody) is a unique rhythmic event, the only time eighth-eighth-quarter occurs (shown in blue boxes), and it therefore stands out when played in turn by each instrument; and the sequential ascent to the climax will also be heard over and over (orange slurs). The feeling of unending grief is composed into every measure of the melody, made evident by numerous small and simple musical materials, such as the scale degree on which a phrase ends or one moment of rhythmic variation. Similar "micro" materials will be examined throughout this article to highlight the manipulation of such aspects in Górecki's music.

[1.5] When asked by Tony Palmer to film a documentary about the Third Symphony,(10) Górecki insisted that it be filmed on the grounds of Auschwitz concentration camp. He said, "to understand me and my symphony we must go there [Auschwitz]," later reminding Palmer that his symphony is "not about Auschwitz. Nor is it about the terrible regime the Poles suffered after the war under Stalin. It is not even about the struggles of Solidarity. . . . But look around you. Feel the emptiness" (Palmer 1993, 20). I understand the "emptiness" as the communal experience of Polish people in the twentieth century. Poland's suffering during the Second World War was profound, and no nation lost more citizens in the Holocaust—most estimates agree that about twenty percent of Poland's population died over the course of the war (Piotrowski 1998, 305). While Górecki as an individual was relatively safe from the dangers of war, the feeling of

emptiness is inescapable, and the damage extends beyond those immediately affected. Górecki also said, "This was my world. The only way to confront this horror, to forget—but you could never forget—was through music" (Palmer 2014, 22:30). Continuing about his symphony, Górecki said it is tragic, but not a tragedy; "I wanted to express a great sorrow. I have no words to say what I mean. The war, the rotten times under communism . . . our life today . . . the starving. What madness! And why? Why? . . . I cannot shake it off" (Palmer 2014, 34:08).

[1.6] The discussion of Górecki's micro-schemata can help musically define the "emptiness" that Górecki composes into his scores. I will introduce each micro-schema in turn alongside characteristic examples from all three of Górecki's stylistic periods, showing a progression from geometric experimentalism to romantic modality to tonal sparsity, and showing greater similarity between highly varied works. Noticing the small patterns in such empty environments is not difficult, and they clarify the evolution of Górecki's music: in this light, there are not large shifts in style, but pivots that hold onto these micro-schemata as grounding support.

2. Micro-Schemata

[2.1] Micro-schemata are defined as stock musical concepts, recurring musical patterns that exist below the level of the melodic idea or subphrase—a voicing, a specific harmony, a three-note motive, etc.—that have particular significance in Górecki's music. From the corpus study involved in this research, I define four distinct but flexible micro-schemata: the Skierkowski turn, the diatonic cluster (and a subcategory, the diatonic smear), the bass semitone, and the first-inversion-triad ending.[(11)] I found that 85.2% of Górecki's works with available scores—including all major works—use at least one of these specific micro-schemata. Eighty-one of Górecki's 88 works have available scores, and of those 81 only 12 do not use any of the four micro-schemata presented (though some of those 12 use less-common micro-schemata; see note 11). The seven works left out of the corpus do not have readily available scores.[(12)] See **Example 2** for the data collected in this study. (All data were collected without computer-assisted analysis.) A checkmark in the micro-schemata columns shows that the work includes that micro-schema at least once, a blank row indicates the work does not include that specific micro-schemata, and blacked-out rows do not have available scores.

[2.2] The Skierkowski turn is a long-established staple of Górecki's style, coined by Thomas (1997a, 84–85). Named after a collector of Polish folk songs, Władysław Skierkowski, the Skierkowski turn is an ascending minor third followed by a descending semitone (E-G-F♯).[(13)] The ascending minor third is occasionally filled in by step (always the first three pitches of the Aeolian or Dorian mode, never Phrygian), but usually by leap.[(14)] Of the four micro-schemata included in this study, the Skierkowski turn is the only one that may be identified as an "event schema." So long as the Skierkowski turn is a string of contiguous notes it qualifies as a micro-schema. Górecki never embellishes or enlarges Skierkowski turns. Often, Górecki's melodies are short, repetitive, or both (the long double bass theme in Example 1 is a well-known exception), which makes locating Skierkowski turns a simple task.[(15)]

[2.3] Examples 3–6 show three different pieces that feature the Skierkowski turn, from 1967, 1976, and 1995 (revised in 2005). **Example 3**, from *Old Polish Music*, shows violins and violas sharing an extremely slow and quiet duet, a moment that stands out in the otherwise brass-dominated work. The Skierkowski turn occurs in the violin section, D♯-F♯-E♯. The vertical counterpoint formed with the violas gives the tense pitch-class intervals of {1, 1, 2, 2}. When played *sul ponticello*, the duet adds to the mysterious and haunting aspect of this section in the work, one of the last pieces of the geometric period. An example from Górecki's romantic modality period, shown in **Example 4**, can be found in the Third Symphony's first movement. The opening bass lament has seven overt uses of the Skierkowski turn, both with the stepwise fill and without, and much of the other material from the melody is deeply related to the contour of the Skierkowski turn. These seven Skierkowski turns are only made more evident as each voice enters, adding to the unending grief explained earlier. In **Example 5**, the climax of the first movement and the most dramatic moment in the symphony (if not all Górecki's music), the soprano sings the Skierkowski turn, E-G-F♯. Furthermore, the resolution of the soprano song does not end on a tonic harmony, instead returning to the canon from the opening of the movement, bringing back the melody with its many Skierkowski turns. Lastly, **Example 6** shows a sparser excerpt, the opening of the second movement from Górecki's third string quartet, . . . *songs are sung*. This movement begins in a triadic fashion with a simple C minor harmony, which is complicated by the viola's Skierkowski turn, E♭-G♭-F, on top of the A♭ major harmony played by the cello. The descending semitone

of the Skierkowski turn is taken one step further to an E♮, ending the short phrase on an uncanny augmented triad. These are just a few of the numerous Skierkowski turns across Górecki's oeuvre, but they show a lineage of geometric experimentalism to romantic modality to unnerving yet tonal sparsity.

[2.4] **Example 7** provides a catalog of pieces that use the Skierkowski turn.[(16)] Only initial or significant occurrences of the Skierkowski turn are shown in Example 7. If the data collected in this research aimed to number every individual instance of a Skierkowski turn in each piece by Górecki, the total would easily reach the thousands (in some cases, such a statistic is useful; see below, [2.7], and [3.1]). In many instances from Example 7, the Skierkowski turn is not just a significant part of the melody, but the only melodic material of a theme; it is even relatively common for the Skierkowski turn to be the only melodic material used in an entire piece, with only slight development. **Example 8** presents the main theme of *Three Pieces in Olden Style* mvmt. II (1963). In the first four bars, the Skierkowski turn is heard twice, and the theme is repeated so many times that the two-minute movement has around 40 Skierkowski turns in just the first violin part. Whether it be the only event happening on the page (as in *Old Polish Music* and *. . . songs are sung*), the most dramatic event happening over the course of an hour-long symphony (as in the Third Symphony's climax), or a small motive in a short work (as in *Three Pieces in Olden Style*), the effect of Górecki's micro-schemata is compounded by frequent repetition.

[2.5] Górecki has offered some insight into the key threads that run through his music. He says, "in every piece of mine, there is something of the Tatra Mountains," referring to a mountain range in Poland that was rarely far from where he lived (Rockwell 1993, 136). He continues, "I need them like a fish needs water, like a man needs air. The folk music is still alive, right up to today. It's not just in my ear, it's in my blood." As Thomas correctly points out (1997b), the influence of folk music on Górecki's compositions is undoubtedly strong, and the same is evidenced by the overwhelming use of the Skierkowski turn throughout Górecki's entire career. From this, it can be said that Górecki's use of the Skierkowski turn micro-schema is inherently tied to Poland. Following the success of the Third Symphony, Górecki says he had ample opportunity to emmigrate from Poland, but "if everybody moved out of Poland, what would remain? And I have always asked myself whether my music would sound the same without these trees, clouds, houses" (Rockwell 1993, 136).

[2.6] A second micro-schema is Górecki's use of diatonic clusters. These are usually all seven pitches of a diatonic collection presented simultaneously, typically within one octave. Depending on surrounding context or on which pitch is in the bass, these clusters can imply a variety of modes. As Thomas has pointed out (1997b), Górecki prefers Dorian and Aeolian; the data indicate a reliance on the Mixolydian and Phrygian modes (the latter often in conjunction with the bass-semitone micro-schema, see [2.9]). The excerpts shared in Examples 9–11 show the same progression as the excerpts shared in Examples 3–6—geometric experimentalism to romantic modality to tonal sparsity.

[2.7] Again from *Old Polish Music*, the notation in **Example 9** is one that could be found in many scores of Penderecki, a contemporary of Górecki: a large black bar filling in the staff. Typically, this notation is used to portray a wall of fully chromatic or even microtonal pitches, divided among individual players in a section. However, Górecki has split each string section into eight parts, each part playing a pitch diatonic to G Mixolydian. The full brass section enters not long after, emphasizing the same diatonic cluster (not pictured). **Example 10** shows another excerpt from the Third Symphony. Measures 348–57 comprise the only passage of music in the first movement that departs from E centricity. The strings and piano play a full A♭ Mixolydian cluster, followed by a full G♭ pentatonic cluster, both in their most compact fashion. The G♭ pentatonic cluster might be subsumed by the A♭ Mixolydian cluster as a subset, or it could be described as a G♭ diatonic cluster with a couple of missing pitches. In **Example 11**, from a trio of art songs for soprano voice, the piano repeats an A♭ Mixolydian cluster 214 times over the course of one song, always at an unchanging quarter-note pulse, stopping only during a brief middle section and for the coda. This cluster is missing D♭ and F, but the soprano sings only one pitch for most of the song, A♭, which solidifies A♭ centricity.[(17)] Even for Górecki, repeating one chord over 200 times is extreme, but characteristic of the sparsity in his music from the '90s.

[2.8] Górecki's diatonic clusters are often achieved by diatonic smears; multiple instruments move in a scalar direction, one instrument staying behind after each new pitch, resulting eventually in a diatonic cluster. Frequently, Górecki has strings follow a vocal melody, as in the excerpts from the second and third symphonies in **Example 12** and **Example 13**. Diatonic smears can also be used to create a rich texture without

tracing a melody, as in the first movement of *Three Pieces in Olden Style* (**Example 14**), in *Old Polish Music* (1967), or in the choral piece *Euntes Ibant et Flebant* (1972). Notice also that both Example 12 and Example 14 contain a Skierkowski turn in their uppermost voice. **Example 15** provides a catalog of diatonic clusters in Górecki's music, with asterisks by each instance achieved via diatonic smear.

[2.9] Rivaled only by the Skierkowski turn, the bass semitone is a noticeably common micro-schema. The bass semitone is a sonority in which the two lowest pitches are a semitone apart. This schema appears frequently in both atonal and tonal contexts (e.g., with a major seventh chord in third inversion). Usually, the bass semitone occurs in a low register (so frequently it might be a schema for the double bass alone), but it does occasionally occur in middle registers when the texture is sparse.

[2.10] Examples 16–18 show the bass semitone in pieces from 1968, 1979, and 2006–9 respectively. In the *Cantata* for organ (**Example 16**), low rumblings in 8' oboe pipes are marked *sempre staccato*, but in the pedals is a D-E♭ dyad, held underneath all the rhythmic activity in the manuals. The C♯2 in the left hand is lower than the pedals, but unlike the staccato manual activity, the held semitone in the pedals has time to reverberate fully through the pipes (even still, C♯2 is a semitone from the next lowest pitch, D2). In such low registers, whether the audience can hear the semitone is not as important as their ability to feel it, either as an uncomfortable sensation of such a low and small interval or by the sheer vibration of the pipes. **Example 17** shows the opening section of *Beatus Vir* for orchestra, choir, and baritone, beginning with many shifts between a C-E♭ and a B-E♭ dyad (presumably C minor and B major, spelled enharmonically). The C is sustained through the chord change, clashing with the incoming B, creating the bass semitone. A late example of the bass semitone can be found in Górecki's Fourth Symphony, which was left mostly in piano score upon his death but later orchestrated by his son and premiered in 2015. However, MikoŌaj Górecki notes which sections were orchestrated by his father, including the piano and organ parts for the excerpt contained in **Example 18** (2013, v). This section contains the main structural harmony of the symphony, heard repeatedly with the same orchestration in the first, second, and fourth movements. This chord consists of an A-minor triad (arguably the tonic of the symphony) with an added G♯ and B♭, where the B♭ is always a semitone away from the root A.

[2.11] Once again, we can trace the evolution of Górecki's compositional style with these three examples of the bass semitone micro-schema. In the cantata for organ, the extreme low register encourages the listener to feel the sound, rather than hear it (in its liberation of sound from pitch, this technique is characteristic of Polish experimentalism). In *Beatus Vir*, the oscillation between two consonant harmonies, C minor and B major, is muddied by one pitch lasting too long in the bass, consistent with the lush orchestral sounds of the romantic middle period. And in the Fourth Symphony, we hear incessant repetitions of a sound that is boisterous, but still the only event on the page (save for the bass drum syncopation), making this section of the symphony intense but sparse. **Example 19** lists each piece from the corpus that uses the bass semitone.

[2.12] A fourth micro-schema is the first-inversion-triad ending. Simply put, a large section, a movement, or a piece ends on a first-inversion triad. These triads are almost always major, and usually they are all "white keys," such as F major or A minor. While there is no serial or sonoristic piece that includes the first-inversion-triad ending micro schema, it can be found in an early example from 1956. In a collection of piano miniatures (**Example 20**), likely written for children (Górecki 2021, iv–v), an E-minor melody is accompanied by one pattern in the left hand, E-G-F♯-G (another Skierkowski turn). The short piece consists of only one harmony, E minor, so when the left hand ends the piece by ascending from E up to G, the harmony in mind is not a root-position G-major chord, but a first-inversion E-minor chord. An example of Górecki's romantic modality, **Example 21** shows *Totus Tuus* for unaccompanied choir. The majority of the work, including the ending, is in E♭ major, and the basses sing only a G♮ for the last three minutes of the 11-minute work while the upper voices move above them, culminating in a stable first-inversion E♭-major triad. And in *For Jasiunia* (**Example 22**) for violin and piano, the violinist moves between the open strings of the instrument (adding to the sparse effect of the music), until the final chord, a first-inversion F-major chord. **Example 23** lists each occurrence of the first-inversion-triad ending micro-schema.[(18)]

3. Corpus Examination and Conclusion

[3.1] **Example 24** shows the data collected in this corpus (another representation of Example 2). Each work is counted only once, including multiple movements, so one micro-schema occurring in multiple movements of

the same piece is only represented once on the timeline (stacked data points are two or more pieces from the same year). Likewise, a piece is given only one data point regardless of the number of individual instances of a micro-schema (see again [2.4]). The timeline is also split into two halves, secular and sacred, to determine if any micro-schemata correlate with a work's spirituality. A number of interesting observations can be made. First, the Skierkowski turn and the bass semitone can be found persistently across Górecki's career with few noticeable gaps. Even in the smaller portion of sacred music, both are found consistently. The diatonic cluster micro-schema becomes increasingly rare as time progresses; perhaps as expected, the early sonorist and experimental works employ clusters, the romantic modal works continue this tradition, and the late sparsity opts for simpler and less brazen harmonic writing (Górecki's output also slowed at the end of his life). Finally, the first-inversion-triad ending is the least common of all four in Górecki's secular works but is relatively common in his sacred works. Furthermore, the first-inversion-triad ending is dispersed across the secular music, but unlike any other micro-schema, it appears within a narrow 9-year span within the sacred works (most of these pieces are unaccompanied choral works). The first-inversion triad ending is also the only micro-schema that did not have a representative example from the geometric period. A chord as simple and consonant as this would be rather out of place in a work of Polish experimentalism.

[3.2] Given that Górecki used these micro-schemata across his career, we can modify the perspective put forward during the theoretical discussion. The micro-schemata in this article were examined in a way that showed the progression from geometric experimentalism to romantic modality to sparsity. Instead, let us focus on the micro-schemata, considering them as a grounding, invariant factor in Górecki's music while the styles in which they are used change. In this sense, the micro-schemata become a metaphor for Górecki's distinct and discretely consistent compositional voice. The diatonic cluster is a particularly good example in this metaphor, as it was used like a typical sonorist "wall of sound," then as a deeply romantic (and modally inflected) diatonic dissonance, and finally as a chord to be repeated over two hundred times, becoming white noise or a backdrop for the soprano text. In each of these examples, the diatonic cluster is what remains consistent, and the context it is found in is what changes.

[3.3] As a listener well-acquainted with Górecki's oeuvre, when I listen to his music I recall how small the micro-schemata appear on the surface, and yet by focusing on the minuscule aspects of the score I am reminded of other instances of the same micro-schema from various points in Górecki's career. The gigantic diatonic clusters of *Old Polish Music* are somehow not dissimilar from the piano's endless repetition of the same sonority in "Poetry! You are a Tranquil Siesta." Likewise, the somber first-inversion triads of *Miserere* are related to the same harmony in the bombastic Second Symphony, two works related to Polish history: Polish Solidarity and the story of Nicolaus Copernicus, a crucial Polish figure.

[3.4] Returning to Górecki's words that to understand his music one must "feel the emptiness," I have proposed that one can hear the "emptiness" as the communal experience, even trauma, of Polish people in the twentieth century. Musically, a listener may connect the small details that Górecki so frequently manipulates in his music to a feeling of emptiness. Just as the continually repeating lament at the beginning of the Third Symphony compounds upon itself, portraying a feeling of unending grief (see again [1.4]), the statistically overwhelming use of the four micro-schemata outlined in this article can similarly manipulate emptiness. Regular repetition of a musical idea as seemingly insignificant as a three-note motive is, in fact, the kind of expression that Górecki's sparse and repetitive compositions make space for. The consistency of the micro-schemata is something that can grant Górecki's music expressive license and can make such repetitive music appear to continually reinvent itself. The manipulation of small musical materials is, in some ways, a manner of compositionally feeling the emptiness.

[3.5] The micro-schemata in this paper are, as far as I can tell, unique to Górecki and tailored to his specific compositional style. The term "micro-schemata"reflects Górecki's music and its sparsity, but the method of finding compositional consistencies and considering them an invariant principle is not necessarily tied to the study of Górecki. By means of conclusion, I offer a few ways in which micro-schemata can be applied largely to schematic theories of compositional organization, particularly for twentieth-century composers, or otherwise further refined. First, while Górecki is notably consistent, many composers are not as dedicated to a similar manner of repetition. Micro-schemata can still be clearly defined while maintaining flexibility—Górecki's music simply requires no special exceptions. Another composer's compositional signatures can still be easily recognizable despite small differences. Second, while the data collected in this study did not account for the exact number of times a micro-schema occurred in a given piece, such an analysis could bring out

interesting aspects of minimalism or other pattern-based music. Lastly, the consistency of compositional signatures challenges notions of periodicity and genre labeling. Even this article perpetuates a familiar "early-middle-late"division of Górecki; however, it does so in order to reveal that the periods themselves are characterized more by similarites than differences. By finding a composer's micro-schemata, we are provided a manner in which we can listen to a composer whose compositional style evolved through a plethora of contexts and associations but maintained a distinct musical voice, allowing us to pinpoint a few methods that define that composer's sound.

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Footnotes

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Return to text

1. Critic Frank J. Oteri shares the statement below in a Polish documentary about Górecki and his career as a Polish composer:

> All of this music across his life connects, but it connects once you really start studying it and seriously listening to it. But a casual listener of the Third Symphony who comes across, say the First Symphony, or comes across the Harpsichord Concerto or *Lerchenmusik*, these really intense, brooding, manic pieces—they might think it's the work of a different composer if they're not really focused on it. They'll say "well wait a minute! I want more of that beautiful, peaceful, Third Symphony stuff. This isn't beautiful and peaceful, this is [imitates the Harpsichord Concerto]." But it is coming out of the same place. And if you study the scores and if you look at the scores, you can see the gestures are there. And if you seriously listen to it, you can hear that those gestures are there. (Rotter-Kozera 2012, 28:00–29:11)

Proving that there is something inherently in these scores that ties them to the composer is not the interest of this research, and neither is pointing out the ignorance of a "casual listener." However, the notion that Górecki's music shares a few key threads is supported by these statements. In the same documentary, Adrian Thomas shares a similar sentiment.

> Henryk Górecki is not just the Third Symphony. Henryk Górecki is much more. And the character of Henryk is the same throughout his career. It is made of granite; it is made of determination; it is truthful; it has got an essence about it which communicates. (Rotter-Kozera 2012, 55:20–56:38)

Return to text

2. Yuri Kholopov and Valeria Tsenova (1995, 40–83) identify many musically specific aspects of Edison Denisov's music that can be seen throughout his career, largely unchanged for several decades, which they refer to as "genres," "characters," and "images." These include (but are not limited to) "shooting" / "pricking" / sharply rhythmical dots, "dotting" and pointillistic "splashes," sonoristic mixtures, and sonoristic arrays. These genres-characters are rather similar in design and practice to the use of micro-schemata in this

research.
Return to text

3. For information on these stylistic eras and the geometric period (1962–70), see Mirka 2004. The titles "romantic modality" and "sparse tonality" are my own, but the time periods are in line with general groupings of Górecki's career.
Return to text

4. For further information on the differences between Górecki's Polish sonorism (1962–63) and his reductive constructivism (1964–70), see Doba 1979–97.
Return to text

5. Many have placed the blanket statement on Górecki as one of the "holy minimalists," "spiritual minimalists," or as a practitioner of the "new simplicity" (Teachout 1995, 50; Rutherford-Johnson 2017, 25; Fisk 1994, 394–412). Even in the album art of Górecki records, we see the marketing suggesting a mood for the music that may not be appropriate. Album photos for recordings of *Miserere* (1981)—a piece written in response to the government's assault against the Polish Solidarity Trade Union—show grey, desolate stone buildings, implying a war-torn Poland, and, for those that only know the Third Symphony, might suggest concentration camps and the Holocaust (Nelson and the Chicago Symphony 1994; Gershon and the Los Angeles Master Chorale 2012). Different albums show stained glass windows or an image of a woman praying (*Holy Minimalism: Tavener, Pärt, and Górecki* 2023; Simonov, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and Gritton 2012a), suggesting that there is a spirituality to the works included; however, the pieces on these albums include *Three Pieces in Olden Style*, the Third Symphony, *Totus Tuus*, and *O Domina Nostra*, of which only the latter two are overtly sacred.

The Third Symphony is intentionally ambiguous regarding its religiosity. The third movement's text is about a mother losing her son in WWI-era uprisings, and so no religious association is made. The text in the first movement is originally meant to be the words of the Virgin Mary talking to her Son as He dies on the cross, but the words themselves have no mention of Mary or Jesus, just a mother and a son. The second movement's famous text takes Helena Wanda Błażusiakówna's words from a Gestapo prison wall inscription, in which she implores "*Mamo nie płacz*," followed by a well-known Polish prayer to the Virgin Mary, "*Zdrowaś Maryjo, łaski pełna*," the "Hail Mary." However, *mamo* is frequently mistranslated as "mother," when it is more closely related to "mama" or even "mommy," often used by children talking to their biological mother, not to the holy Mother, where *matka* would be used instead. Furthermore, the declension *mamo*, from *mama*, implies the speaker is addressing their mother; "mama don't cry." My thanks to Derek Myler for his help in translating this passage.
Return to text

6. For further information on the death of Górecki's mother and the effect it had on the composer's music, see also Trochimczyk 2003.
Return to text

7. This Chopin mazurka was a frequent target for quotation by twentieth- and twenty-first-century composers. In addition to Górecki's use of this mazurka, Caroline Shaw's *Gustave le Gray* (2012) for solo piano is cast in a clear ternary form, with the outer sections being Shaw's original composition, and the center section being the entirety of Chopin's mazurka unaltered. For more on Shaw's piece, see Belcher 2020, 1–50.
Return to text

8. This reference had gone unnoticed until the composer himself pointed it out to Adrian Thomas. Thomas does not provide any description other than "that biting chord which comes halfway through the first movement's development" (1997b). This chord is most likely the chord heard in mm. 280–84. Both chords, from the third symphony of both Beethoven and Górecki, are identical in pitch structure. Each is spelled A-C-E-F, either an F major seven chord in first inversion, or an A minor chord with an added note.
Return to text

9. Part of the Third Symphony's mythic appeal was a belief that the symphony was a complete failure until Dawn Upshaw and the London Sinfonietta recorded it in 1992, a record that would go on to sell more than a million copies. However, despite stories of a dramatic premiere heckled by a "prominent French musician,"

(presumably Pierre Boulez), Luke Howard has provided a more accurate picture of the symphony's earlier history, highlighting the symphony's large success in Poland and parts of Eastern Europe. See Howard 1998, 2003, and 2007.
Return to text

10. See Palmer 2014. See also Cizmic's discussion of Palmer's documentary and its problematic and inaccurate portrayal of universal grief (2012, 97–166). Cizmic argues that Palmer likely felt there was a sense of universality to the Third Symphony. For example, Palmer uses images of both the Holocaust and modern-day images of starving African children while the Third Symphony plays in the background. Because Górecki's symphony is tied so closely to Polish history, a universal understanding of the music may not be appropriate.
Return to text

11. These four are the most prevalent and the most statistically significant, though other micro-schemata occur often. Other micro-schemata include parallel major sevenths (*Genesis III: Monodramma* op. 19 [1963]), Phrygian twinge at the close of a work (*Euntes Ibant et Flebant* op. 32 [1972]), additive paragraphs (Third Symphony mvmt. 1; see Thomas 1997) or scale degree 2 melodic ending (*Three Fragments to Words by Stanisław Wyspiański* op. 69 [1995–96]).
Return to text

12. These seven remaining scores are "unavailable" in the sense that they are non-locatable, are out-of-print and sold-out by publishers, or are too difficult to obtain from the libraries that hold them (several scores are held in the Henryk Mikołaj Górecki Archive in Poland's National Library, which has scanned and made public many scores and manuscripts).
Return to text

13. Also pointed out by Thomas is the Górecki motto motif, an ascending minor third without the descending semitone. Thomas calls it a "motto" because it is too small to be comfortably labeled a signature motif (1997b). Thomas also claims that Górecki prefers the Skierkowski turn to the motto motif following the Third Symphony, but the data collected in this corpus find this to be largely untrue; the Skierkowski turn can be found as far back as Górecki's op. 2 in 1955. To illustrate this point, the collected data counts only Skierkowski turns that are given verbatim, a statistic that dwarfs the motto motif on its own. The motto motif may be considered another micro-schema, albeit a less-common relative of the Skierkowski turn.
Return to text

14. A listener may notice that the Skierkowski turn sometimes returns to its starting note (i.e., E-G-F♯-E, as in the climax of the Third Symphony, Example 5), and sometimes is left unresolved (E-G-F♯, as in the double bass theme in the Third Symphony, Example 4). These two variants carry different connotations, but they are both regarded as Skierkowski turns in this corpus study and by Thomas (1997a, 85).
Return to text

15. A proto-Skierkowski turn can be found in the main motivic content of *Choros I* op. 20 (1964). At some point, each instrument will incessantly repeat the motive of an ascending diminished third followed by a descending semitone. This is also expanded to an ascending major third followed by a descending major second. The same proto-Skierkowski turn can be found in the soprano line of *Genesis III: Monodramma* op. 19 (1963), rehearsal 11 and similar.
Return to text

16. The second movement of the Third Symphony features the Skierkowski turn with an ascending major third, as opposed to the normative minor third (E-G♯-F♯). Throughout the data collection in this research, I aim to be intervallically rigorous—the numbers speak for themselves without exception. But given the overwhelming usage of the Skierkowski turn throughout the first movement, and Thomas's designation of the "major mode" Skierkowski turn in his 1997 talk, this exception is included here. *Amen* op. 35, written a year prior to the Third Symphony, also features the "majorized" Skierkowski turn at its climax (mm. 98–161), at the same pitch level.
Return to text

17. Occasionally, the pianist adds a D♮ to the cluster, instead implying an A♭ Lydian ♭7 scale (the acoustic scale), but the D♮ is so rare and the A♭ centricity so strong that the significance is minor.

Return to text

18. The first-inversion-triad ending micro-schema in the First Piano Sonata is the only instance I am aware of in which a first-inversion seventh chord is used at the close of a work. This may be due to the timeline—this is one of Górecki's earliest works, and only the second piece included in Example 23. While first-inversion-seventh-chord *endings* are rare in Górecki's music, first-inversion seventh chords in general are very common. For example, the passage discussed in note 8 is a first-inversion seventh chord (and many others occur in that same movement). The final sonority of the First Piano Sonata is also interesting in that it is one of only a handful of tonally reminiscent chords in the sonata—to end on a consonant harmony is shocking. However, the register and voicing hardly qualifies the chord as "consonant"; the final chord in the First Piano Sonata may be simply a first-inversion F-major chord with E as an added dissonance.
Return to text
