

## REPETITION TROPES AND LEVELS OF OBLITERATION IN JOHN ADAMS'S SAXOPHONE CONCERTO AND *AMERICAN BERSERK*

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**Abstract:** The music of John Adams has grown far away from its roots in Minimalism, but even in complex works like *American Berserk* (2001) and the Saxophone Concerto (2013) one can detect the working of a compositional mind conditioned by procedures relating back to earlier periods of the composer's output. A feature of Adams recent work is a continuing concern with various repetition strategies but in a far more veiled and multilayered manner. Another feature of both works is the deployment of 'pushing up' and 'pushing down' material manipulated rhythmically and raised to a structural level. Two strategies are adopted and adapted to investigate these features. The first, is from Rebecca Leydon's 'Towards a Typology of Minimalist Tropes', which considers the *qualities* of repetition in Minimal music, and the second is an idea borrowed from David Osmond Smith's monograph on Berio's *Sinfonia*, *Playing on Words*, where he considers 'levels of obliteration' of an underlying text (Mahler 2 Scherzo 'In Ruhig Fließender Bewegung') in the third movement of the *Sinfonia*.

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John Adams has been vocal in his attempts to distance himself from stylistic labelling, once describing himself as 'a Minimalist tired of Minimalism'. Few composers like having labels attached to them, but the contention in this article is that however much Adams's musical language has changed since the two piano works that announced him to the world (*Phrygian Gates* and *China Gates*, both 1977) there remains a link in his recent works that can be traced back to models from the early years of his music. In particular, the concern with using (or suggesting the use) of material in cyclical patterns (the opening movement of the Violin Concerto (1993)), the use of modal/tonal material however sophisticated (*American Berserk*, Saxophone Concerto) and the ability to sustain single ideas over large time spans (the opening melody of *Naïve and Sentimental Music* (1999)).

Both *American Berserk* and the Saxophone Concerto have a characteristic surface fluency based on rhythmic drive and the use of harmonies with discrete modal and tonal identities. However, both works give rise to the suspicion that there are hidden cyclical procedures at work producing the sounding result. It seems inconceivable

that works with this kind of surface fluency can be written without some kind of pre-compositional design.

Some of these processes can be observed on the harmonic and motivic level, and while there is something to be gained from that approach, it is not, for me, the most useful one. Instead, in both works I want to consider the nature and qualities of *repetition* that appear to underpin the structures. In *American Berserk* this points towards veiled cyclical patterning, and in the Saxophone Concerto it is a *modus operandi* that concerns various 'blocking agents' (mostly rhythmic) that disrupt the opening suave flow of crotchets. The thesis projected is that although the harmonic language of Adams's music since the 1980s has deepened and become more harmonically sophisticated, patterns of thinking relating to the shaping of time over (relatively) long spans can be linked back to modes of thinking present in earlier periods of the composer's output. While *repetition* is not immediately apparent on the surface of the music, deeper *tropes of repetition* have become part of the artist's compositional DNA.

Rebecca Leydon's 'Towards a Typology of Minimalist Tropes'<sup>1</sup> considers works from the early period of Minimalism to describe various qualities of repetition.<sup>2</sup> Leydon takes her lead from the work of Richard Middleton<sup>3</sup> on the functions of repetition used in popular music. Middleton uses the terms *Musematic* and *Discursive* – the former referring to the repetition of the smallest units (riffs) and the latter the repetition of longer and more complex units (phrases). Leydon extends this thinking towards more complex forms of repetition and forms the following six tropes:

1. *Maternal*: repetition evokes a 'holding environment', or regression to an imagined state of prelinguistic origins (Raymond Scott's *Soothing Sounds for Baby*)
2. *Mantric*: repetition portrays a state of mystical transcendence (Arvo Pärt's 'liturgical minimalism'; John Adams's *Shaker Loops*)
3. *Kinetic*: repetition depicts (or incites) a collectivity of dancing bodies (Spring Heel Jack; various electronica)
4. *Totalitarian*: repetition evokes an involuntary state of unfreedom (Rzewski's *Coming Together*, Andriessen's *De Staat*)
5. *Motoric*: repetition evokes an indifferent mechanized process (Nyman's *Musique à Grande Vitesse*, Adams's *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*)
6. *Aphasic*: repetition conveys notions of cognitive impairment, madness, or logical absurdity (Nyman's *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, Satie's *Vexations*)

Although Leydon is applying this thinking to minimal music in its early stages in the 1960s and '70s, I see no reason not to consider later works under these headings and to ask whether further 'tropes' might be discovered in a work of an ex-minimal composer, that is, to look at the work through the *qualities* of repetition. Whether or not these tropes might prove to be useful tools applied to other contemporary musics is a moot point; but it seems rather artificial to apply them to

<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Leydon, 'Towards a Typology of Minimalist Tropes', *Music Theory Online* 8/4 (2002).

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Tristian Evans for this idea. Evans uses Leydon to look at works by Philip Glass and others. See Tristian Evans, 'Analysing Minimalist and Postminimalist Music: an Overview of Methodologies', in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 241–58.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990).

composers whose personae have not been forged within some kind of sympathy for a style of music that set out to restore pulsation and tonality to a central role.<sup>4</sup>

In 1960s Minimalism, works created by doggedly pursuing a single idea often took the form of a process playing itself out, inviting us to observe gradual change, or invoking our boredom threshold where the smallest change becomes a moment of high drama. Adams himself was a master of micro-managing modal evolution so that a small change carries high dramatic significance; consider the finesse in which Adams adds a new tone (D) to four sounding ones in *Shaker Loops*:



Example 1:  
John Adams, *Shaker Loops*, bar 23.

This idea of delayed gratification, judging how long an event should last before we are given something new, is one of the hallmarks of Adams's works of the 1970s. The slow evolution of modal identities is often associated with the confinement of material within restricted registers. The material shown in Example 1 is maintained within a register of an octave and a half around middle C in the violins/violas for the first three minutes before a sudden swoop into the lower registers delivers a refreshing change where we hear the cello and double bass for the first time. In a more dramatic/glamorous way this happens abruptly in the last movement of *Harmonielehre*, 'Meister Eckhardt and Quackie', where the sudden entry of a chord in the bass interrupts a lengthy passage of shimmering ostinati in the high registers of the orchestra. The significance of moments like this is the equivalent of a thirst being quenched after a period of drought and is central to the ethos of some of the seminal works of early Minimalism such as Terry Riley's *Keyboard Study No.1* (1965). Kenneth Martin puts it elegantly when he says that 'we perceive change most readily within a restricted field of similarity'.<sup>5</sup>

Adams often cites the influence of technology on the evolution of his musical thinking. In his autobiography *Hallelujah Junction*<sup>6</sup> he describes the pre-digital equipment he put together as his own contributions to a series of experimental concerts he was putting on in San Francisco in 1976 under the heading of 'Wavemaker' – a work that was the prototype for *Shaker Loops*. More recently (1997) in a *Sound on Sound* interview he talks about how the passacaglia theme in the second movement of the Violin Concerto was the result of studio manipulation.

In my violin concerto, there's a bass line in the second movement that's very similar to the Pachelbel canon bass line. But it expands and shrinks all the time

<sup>4</sup> I keep an open mind here since, while not using Leydon, Maarten Beirens considers Karel Goeyvaerts *Litanie IV* within a 'repetitive' context in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music* even though it contains little regular pulsation.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Parsons, 'Systems in Art and Music', *The Musical Times*, vol. 117, no. 1604 (October 1976), pp. 815–18, here 816.

<sup>6</sup> John Adams, *Hallelujah Junction: Composing an American Life* (London: Faber, 2008)

and is transposed into very unusual harmonies. I wrote that using the time scale and transposition devices from [Mark of the Unicorn's] Performer.<sup>7</sup>

For Adams, being in touch physically with the sounds he is working with is intimately connected to evaluating the timing of change in works that, in some way, need to adapt themselves to the time restraints of conventional concert hall programmes.

What links a work like the Saxophone Concerto to earlier concerns of Minimalism is that despite the surface contrasts, rhythmic invention, melodic variety, tonal diversity and orchestral flair, the concerto stems from and is sustained by *one underlying structural idea*. This idea is contained within its most banal material: the modal chords that appear from the outset in bar 2 after an upbeat flourish. The beauty of their ordinariness is that they do not attract attention as important material. But in a manner similar to the chords that run through the opening movement of the Violin Concerto (1992), they give rise to the suspicion that the chords are subject to some kind of process driven by sophisticated variations on 'pushing up' and 'pushing down' forces. While Adams is averse to rigid forms of repetition we sense that there is a design to the rise, fall and *Klangfarben* use of harmony throughout the piece that generates the surface form of the movement.

While I do make some reference to specific harmonic content and one important rhythmic motif, I have found that a much more fruitful approach is to consider the movement as a whole as a panoramic chordal labyrinth that the composer uses as pre-existing 'core material' from which the concerto is sculpted. Through the use of an array of interventions within this labyrinth, the composer produces a surface form that can be understood in more conventional ways.

We might begin by considering an important change of emphasis from the music Adams was writing in the 1980s that enabled him to approach the concerto form in the first place:

I knew that if I were to compose a Violin Concerto I would have to solve the issue of melody. I could not possibly have written such a thing in the 1980s because my compositional language was principally one of massed sonorities riding on great waves of energy.<sup>8</sup>

In some ways this statement is initially perplexing, in that melody is abundantly present in many of the 1980s works to which he refers. But this is usually a 'doubled' melody in an orchestral setting, a different matter from a solo instrument pitched against a large orchestra.

This quotation does not tell us how the 'issue of melody' in a concerto context was resolved, and we know from an interview with Adams in 1996<sup>9</sup> that he was still uncomfortable about some aspects of the solo role in the Violin Concerto. We also know that Adams had taken an interest in Nicholas Slonimsky's *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*.<sup>10</sup> Again, the composer refers to submitting the Slonimsky patterns to various 'multiplications' through the use of his computer program (Performer). The use of these patterns plays a role in deepening the sophistication of Adams harmonic language from the 1990s and it may not be fanciful to suggest that the way

<sup>7</sup> John Adams, 'Crossing Borders', *Sound on Sound*, February 1997, [http://www.soundon.com/sos/1997\\_articles/feb97/johnadams.html](http://www.soundon.com/sos/1997_articles/feb97/johnadams.html).

<sup>8</sup> John Adams on [www.earbox.com/violin-concerto/](http://www.earbox.com/violin-concerto/) (accessed 4 September 2015).

<sup>9</sup> John Adams, Rebecca Jemian, Marie de Zeeuw, 'An interview with John Adams', *Perspectives of New Music* 34 No 2 (1996) pp. 98–9.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Slonimsky, *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns* (New York: Macmillan, 1986; originally published 1947).

Slonimsky presents his patterns in ascending and descending arches with suggested embellishments may have suggested strategies that helped the composer become more comfortable with the concerto form.

*Adams Saxophone Concerto opening*

Example 2:  
John Adams, Saxophone Concerto,  
opening.

There is a direct parallel between the Violin Concerto and the Saxophone Concerto that is to do with the relationship between soloist and orchestra. Adams is well known as a composer with a good sense of idiomatic writing for instruments. This comes from his own experience as a clarinetist and conductor. He seeks compositional forms that allow him space to write freely and idiomatically, and in studying the *passacaglia* movement of the Violin Concerto far more is revealed about the work by the orchestral parts than by that of the soloist. I propose that, in this instance as with the Saxophone Concerto, the orchestral backdrop was fully conceived before the solo part was finalised, as the title 'Body through which the Dream Flows' suggests.

But is the single idea of chords 'pushing up' and 'pushing down' as an underlying structural device sufficient as the basis of a whole movement? All music goes up and down in some manner. But in this concerto the up/down flow is raised to a structural level. In the 1996 interview there is some evidence to back up this claim. Talking about the Violin Concerto, the composer says

What's the expression we learned in biology, 'Phylogeny replicates ontogeny'? Basically, the large organism is a picture of the smallest cellular structure. For example, in the first movement, those rising waves of triads become the basic genetic material for the entire movement. They make their effect felt everywhere, even in the cadenza. I perform all kinds of operations on these rising waves of triads, transforming them into a multitude of shapes and forms: they change mode, change direction, undergo all kinds of augmentation and diminution, and at one point even become a kind of walking bass line. Changes of proportion, mode, direction, et cetera all add up to making the Concerto, of all my works, even more than *Shaker Loops*, an analyst's tidepool.

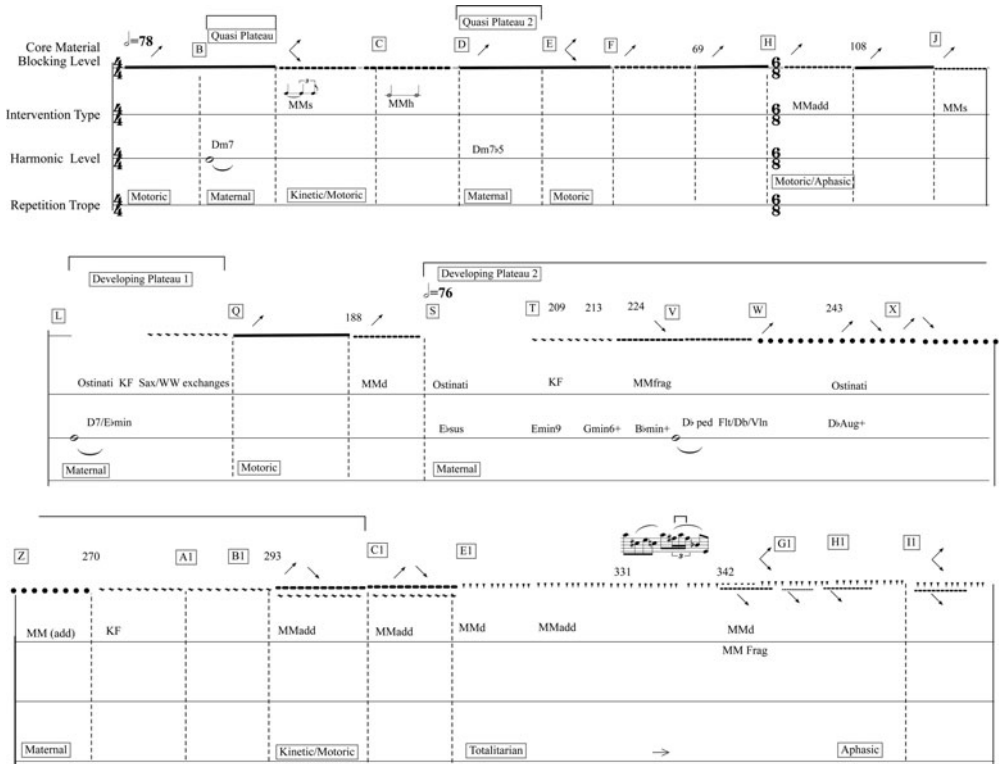
The rise and fall strategy also provides a malleable and non-didactic technique that provides an ideal 'light touch' formal approach that, for a composer like Adams, can be constantly renewed, and through which the soloist's path can be mapped.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Another article could be written on the various jazz saxophone playing styles that Adams seeks to reflect in the role for the commissioning soloist (Tim McAllister) and more can be found on this at: [http://www.mercurynews.com/music/ci\\_26293571/timothy-mcallister-deconstructs-john-adams-saxophone-concerto](http://www.mercurynews.com/music/ci_26293571/timothy-mcallister-deconstructs-john-adams-saxophone-concerto) (accessed 18 March 2016).

As an example of the application of Leydon's Repetition Tropes to this work, consider the fetishistic way this melodic line is written, cycling around a triplet figure in a fixed location (see Example 3).

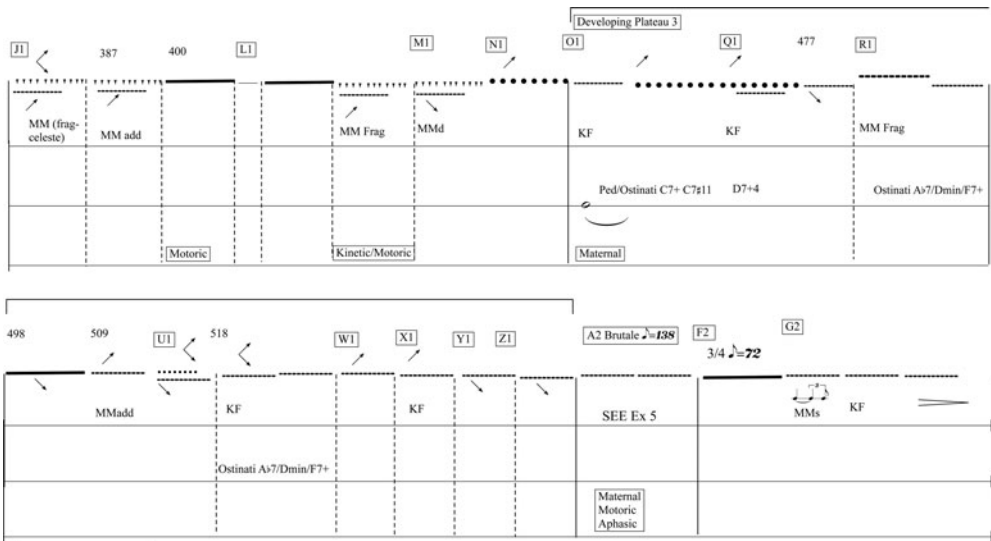


Example 3:  
John Adams, Saxophone Concerto,  
Movement 1, bar 382 (transposed for  
alto saxophone).<sup>12</sup>



Example 4:  
John Adams, Saxophone Concerto  
(Movement 1) Groundplan structure  
(continued opposite).

<sup>12</sup> Saxophone Concerto by John Adams Copyright © 2013 by Hendon Music Inc, a Boosey and Hawkes Company. International rights secured. Used by permission.



This is comparable to Leydon’s ‘Aphasic’ trope and it seems unlikely that a composer without a background in repetitive music would feel the need to anchor such a line around a ‘homing’ figure like this. This triplet motif appears tentatively for the first time in bar 331 but its appearance in this more developed shape is triggered by a full blown unison bipolar eruption in the woodwind at Fig. I1 (bar 367). The shaping of melodic material (in this instance around a ‘homing’ figure) is symptomatic of an approach to melodic writing in the orchestral parts as a whole, when melodies replace the ‘genetic’ core material rise and fall.

In my Groundplan Structure (see Example 4), the first level that tracks the progress of the core material ‘pushing up and pushing down’ transfers to the shaping of melodic lines at various points in which the opposing magnetic pull can be felt on the shaping of these lines from the top and bottom of the score.

A further conceit I used in preparing the Groundplan Structure is borrowed from David Osmond Smith’s analysis of the third movement of the Berio *Sinfonia*, ‘In Ruhig Fliessender Bewegung’, where he refers to ‘Obliteration as Form’ and proposes five levels of obliteration of the underlying text on which the movement is based, the Scherzo from Mahler’s Second Symphony.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> David Osmond-Smith, *Playing on Words: a Guide to Luciano Berio’s Sinfonia* (London: RMA Monographs, 1985).

In my Groundplan Structure, the core material is the equivalent of an underlying text that suffers various degrees of intervention up to, and including, complete obliteration and, in some instances, transformation into melody and *Klangfarbenmelodie*. An index of terms is provided on the Groundplan, but all modifications of the core material are measured against the way this material is first presented – in crotchet movement at minim = 78 and represented by a solid black line.

The second tier in the Groundplan represents the tools Adams uses to transform the Core Material, usually some form of metric intervention. The third level presents some harmonic material most relevant to the plateaux and the bottom level presents an interpretation of Leydon's Repetition Tropes, the qualities of repetition each passage suggests.

When I mentioned earlier that this Groundplan strategy enables a surface structure that can be understood in more conventional ways, I was referring to a dynamic that infuses the whole movement between the extremes of Leydon's 'Maternal' and 'Aphasic' tropes. This centres around the function of the plateaux. From the outset, the plateaux are used to check the Mantric flow of core material harmonies ('Calm down dear!') The quasi plateaux initially fail to stop the Mantric flow (Fig. B and Fig. D) but in the subsequent ones the flow is checked by the use of harmonically stabilising materials – ostinati, pedal points, tonally defined centres and the use of the core material as *Klangfarbenmelodie*.

The effect of these plateaux in conventional terms is to suggest 'second subject' areas and they often trigger less aggressive and lyrical ideas in the solo part. However, the long-term drive in the movement is towards the Aphasic and is interestingly explored in the 'Brutale' passage at A2. Here we have three repetition tropes in direct confrontation.

The image displays a musical score for Example 5, consisting of three systems. The first system shows WW/Brass and Strings/Piano parts with a dense, complex texture. The second system, labeled 'A2', shows WW/Brass, Strings, and Cb. parts with a more rhythmic and repetitive texture. The third system, labeled 'B2', shows a Flute part with a melodic line. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Example 5:  
Adams, Saxophone Concerto,  
Figure A2 (continued opposite).



2

599 603 607

WW/Brass

Strings

3 1 2 1 1 1 2 1 2 4 2 3 4 2 3 2 3 1 8 7 7 2 1 1 9 10 3 11 12 2 1 2 13 14 1 1

WW/Brass

Strings

Oboe/Sax/Clt

1 2 2 1 3 1 4

15 11 2 11 2 16 17 18 1 19 20 21 22 2 1 23

In Example 5 we see a constant pulsed drone in the bass on the intervals of C and D – the ‘Holding Environment’ of the Maternal trope. The woodwind and brass have five chords running at a slower pace than the strings with a tendency to cling on to chord one (the Motic trope perhaps). The strings are the most interesting in that they start with an attempt to cling on to the Maternal by a preponderance of chords one and two but gradually spiral out of control by gravitating towards increasing use of the chords at the end of their 23 chord spectrum and towards the Aphasical/bipolar end of Leydon’s tropes.

Although I am not looking primarily at harmonic structure I would like to address some issues about Adams’s harmonic language in relation to the core material as originally expressed, and in its deployment in the *Klangfarben* passages of the piece.

In his book *The Apollonian Clockwork*, Louis Andriessen says of Messiaen’s Mode 2 (the octatonic scale), that ‘dogmatic and automatic use of this scale leads to a malinger music, reeling around in circles, biting its own tail, scurrying hither and thither’.<sup>14</sup> Adams makes extensive use of octatonic scales in both the Saxophone Concerto and the Violin Concerto, but he is well aware of the ‘trap’ that Andriessen describes. The structural function of the core material in the Saxophone Concerto could have been arrived at lazily, by choosing an available chord and sequencing each voice stepwise through the mode, but Adams is a diligent composer and employs two strategies to avoid ‘malinger’. First, he repeats some pitches in individual voices while the others progress stepwise. Second, he does not let Mode 2 predominate, varying it with harmonies taken from other modes, Lydian in bar 10–11, Slonimsky pattern 20 in bar 22–23 and so on.

I want to move on now to *American Berserk* (2001) because, even though it was written 12 years before the Saxophone Concerto, it demonstrates a number of techniques that seem to have been fairly established at the time, but which take on slightly different applications in a larger scale work. *American Berserk* is a solo piano work that operates on a much higher level of tension and sheer aggression than the suave and urbane Saxophone Concerto, largely because of the influence on the work of some of the more robotic player

<sup>14</sup> Louis Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger, *The Apollonian Clockwork: On Stravinsky* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 229

piano music of Conlon Nancarrow. One's first impression is of being overwhelmed by a great torrent of chords in sprung ragtime and bebop rhythms, a great tumble-dryer of common chords. While the piece cannot be described as 'tonal', it is certainly comprised of a majority of tonally juxtaposed chords – major, minor, augmented – in every inversion. On first hearing one also has the feeling that processes are at work that somehow involve repeated journeys through similar harmonic and rhythmic terrain, but in a fractured, quasi-mechanistic way. Isolated accented individual tones or octaves also seem to draw undue attention to themselves in performance: F# in bar 15; E $\flat$ , E, C and D in bars 41–44, E $\flat$  and C# in bars 49 and 50.

Jeff Lhankov<sup>15</sup> has provided an exhaustive analysis of the materials of *American Berserk*; I will allude to some of his findings but I do not intend to replicate them. Lhankov comments on the melodic and rhythmic motivic content of the piece, the chorale motives and their variations, connective chord patterns, the use of Slonimsky scale patterns taken from the *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*, the influence of Nancarrow, various score editions, and aspects of performance practice. In conclusion he notes that 'having followed Adams career since the 1980s I was under the impression that he had completely abandoned minimalism. . . . My analysis has shown that despite the apparently radical surface departures of *American Berserk*, one may still observe links to Adams's minimalist past'.

As with the Saxophone Concerto I want to examine the tropes of repetition and the way in which the work raises 'pushing up' and 'pushing down' forces to a structural level. *American Berserk* presents levels of repetition on an altogether more compact and sophisticated level that pushes Leydon's tropes to the edge of usefulness. This provides me with an opportunity to expand Leydon's repertoire of tropes. Lhankov breaks down the material in the following way: a scherzo 'theme' and its derived motives.<sup>16</sup>

Example 6a:  
John Adams, *American Berserk*,  
scherzo theme.

<sup>15</sup> Jeff Lhankov 'The solo Piano Compositions of John Adams: Style, Analysis, and Performance' (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University 2014).

<sup>16</sup> All excerpts from *American Berserk* by John Adams copyright © 2002,2007 by Hendon Music Inc, a Boosey and Hawkes Company. International Copyright secured. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Piano

Bar 1 r.h.                      Bar 8 - 9 r.h.                      Bar 39 r.h.

Pno.

Bar 5 - 6 l.h.                      Bar 28 l.h.                      Bar 8 - 9 l.h.

Example 6b:  
John Adams, *American Berserk*,  
scherzo motives.

Chorale Themes and variations:

Piano

*Original Theme Bars 45 -47*

Pno.

*first of 5 variations of shape Bar 50-53*

Example 7:  
Chorale themes.

Connective patterns nearly always presented in ascending lines and often based on Slonimsky patterns:

Piano

*American Berserk l.h. Bars 70-74 (after Lhankov)*

*Slonimsky pattern 588*

Example 8:  
Connective patterns around  
Slonimsky pattern No. 588.



*Bar 144 'berserk!'*

Piano

fff

Example 11:  
John Adams, *American Berserk*, Rising  
treble.

*bar 25*

Piano

*etc*

*Bar 306 'Wild'*

Pno.

ff

Example 12:  
John Adams, *American Berserk*,  
Descending patterns.

4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13-17

2 19 20 21 23 25 26 28 29 30 31

3 *Holding pattern* 32 33 34

4 *Chorale Theme* 45

Example 13:  
John Adams, *American Berserk*,  
Svengali trope

(a)

Piano

Example 14:  
John Adams, *American Berserk*, (a)  
bars 62–70 and (b) Comodo.

appears again at bars 26–28, 60, 70, 81–82, 156, 225–226 and 239 in the same register and appears to be a regenerating figure that has a ‘slingshot’ effect on material around it. A ‘Slingshot’ repetition trope involves a previously heard motif being repeated in a fetishised manner in order to re-energise itself in preparation for further excursions. In terms of the way the piece is organised around ‘pushing up’ and ‘pushing down’ forces, this is easily seen at various points in the work. Ascending patterns can be seen from bars 86 to 107 in the bass: and in the treble at the first climax at bar 144–146.

Descending patterns can be found in the bass at bars 25–34 (and 62–67), with Stravinskian octave displacement, and in the treble at the second climax at bar 306.<sup>17</sup>

But another, more subtle and disguised, descending force suggests the presence of other material the composer may have had in front of him as sketch material. From the opening until the first appearance of the chorale theme (bar 45) there are two cycles of descent from C6 and two cycles from G5 and a holding pattern around the same G (see [Example 13](#)); I am ignoring a few moments where individual chords are thrown up an octave.

<sup>17</sup> The manipulation of the bass descending motifs is considered in detail in Lhankov, ‘The solo Piano Compositions of John Adams’.

(b)

Piano

5

8

These pitches form curves from which the scherzo motives can be suspended, effectively a 'Svengali Trope' where a hidden pattern exerts an influencing shape on foreground material. Similar stabilising tropes in the form of a cantus firmus line continue in the chorale sections of the piece appearing as variations, and in the passages where the four note motive is used in slowly ascending shapes (see [Example 9](#)).

Two repeated harmonic terrains present new forms of repetition in the work. One is an almost direct repetition of the chorale theme and the other, a 'scouring out' of a previous passage through arpeggiation. The first repeated passage is from bars 115 to 126 and repeats the first chorale statement from bars 45 to 56. The differences in this passage are very slight: a crotchet delay of entry at the start and some replacement of arpeggiated chords with block chords towards the end. The second repeat starts at bar 147, marked 'comodo', and repeats bars heard from bars 62 to 70 ending with a downward cascade of chords similar to the cascade in bars 68–69.

Again this passage is based on a version of the chorale theme but with two main differences. First, the chords are offset against the metres they are contained within and second, the right hand arpeggiates (scours) chords previously heard in chorale form. These passages belong in the 'Maternal/holding' area of Leydon's tropes since they provide a veiled recognition of previously heard material. But they also hint at the existence of pre-existing sketch material, as well as

the possibility that studio realisations of the work in progress were used to monitor the formal coherence of a piece almost overwhelmed by the density and persistence of ideas vying for our attention.

While the language of John Adams music has deepened and increased in harmonic complexity and sophistication, works like *American Berserk* and the Saxophone Concerto can still be understood as having tangible links to the composer's early output. While the early works adhere more closely to the tropes of repetition that Leydon identifies, the recent works develop new and more sophisticated tropes of their own. A central idea that links the two works is the elevation to a structural principle of the gravitational pull of upward and downward moving forces. For a composer averse to rigid systemic procedures, this way of working provides a 'light touch' formal procedure that, while suggesting a general direction, allows the composer instinctive momentary deviations from it. The works also suggest a much richer engagement and development of forms of repetition that not only push Leydon's tropes towards destruction but also point towards the scholarly pursuit of new repetition tropes through which to evaluate music that is genetically connected to the evolution of minimal music.