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Source: *Music Analysis*, Mar. - Jul., 1989, Vol. 8, No. 1/2 (Mar. - Jul., 1989), pp. 77-123

Published by: Wiley

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/854327>

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ALAN STREET

SUPERIOR MYTHS, DOGMATIC ALLEGORIES: THE RESISTANCE TO MUSICAL UNITY

Unity is the condition essential to beauty
in every form. (Augustine 1886: 236)

How hard it is to face the open text. (Howard 1975: xi)

I

In the first of a series of lectures on the development of modern musical language, given in 1932, Anton Webern made the observation that

To be very general, it's a matter of creating a means to express the greatest possible unity in music. There we have a word we could discuss all day. Perhaps, after all, it's important to talk about these things – I mean things so general that everyone can understand them, even those who only want to sit and listen passively. For I don't know what the future has in store. (1963: 42)

While the specific means to which he referred was that of twelve-note serialism, the value of this 'secret key', as he called it, turned on the possibility of its gaining access to a necessary aesthetic property: that of unity. The equation of generality with essentiality was in fact directly confirmed by the most celebrated of the composer's recommendations on the subject:

Unity is surely the indispensable thing if meaning is to exist. Unity, to be very general, is the establishment of the utmost relatedness between all component parts. So in music, as in all other human utterance, the aim is to make as clear as possible the relationships between the parts of the unity; in short, to show how one thing leads to another. (1963: 42)

From this point Webern's thesis developed quickly, leading to the fundamental

premiss that unity must prevail in order to ensure the comprehensibility of musical thought. However, it was not until later in the course that these issues were joined with two of his other favoured concepts: organicism and variety. Here the illustration was provided by the Goethean image of the primeval plant, whose 'root is in fact no different from the stalk, the stalk no different from the leaf, and the leaf no different from the flower: variations of the same idea' (1963: 53). A discussion of dodecaphony as system then brought the series to a close, but not before its laws had been encapsulated in the additional symbolic form of the ancient Latin proverb (1963: 56):

S A T O R
A R E P O
T E N E T
O P E R A
R O T A S

Through this instruction, Webern revealed himself as the dedicated inheritor of an enduring critical orthodoxy. To be exact, the idea that one thing might lead to another had been the guiding principle of Western music in its entirety prior to the dissolution of tonality. At the same time, Webern's continued adherence to this philosophy was by no means unique; the sentiments articulated above were of course central to Schoenbergian teaching. For example, although its formulation is less expansive, the consideration of form that heads *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* cites organicism, logic and coherence as a basis for musical comprehensibility in a fashion which obviously parallels (and almost certainly prefigures) Webern's observations on the matter. Interestingly enough, neither composer thought to convey a sense of discomfort with the outright traditionalism of these opinions; for them at least, modernist experiment could be tempered by aesthetic conservatism. Yet even with the adjustment of hindsight this position appears largely unexceptionable, even appropriate. Indeed without ever knowing as much, minds like theirs, unsure of what the future might hold, could rightly feel vindicated by the statement that still, some fifty years later, 'the work of art seems . . . above all an *organism* [whose] . . . elements are linked by functional relations [resulting not] . . . from an arbitrary formulation, but from the evolution of a process' (Höller 1984: 35).

This type of wholehearted devotion to artistic unity finds an obvious correlation within all forms of reflective musical thinking. In this context the idea is effectively treated as a commonplace; hence, just as Langer's notion of 'commanding form' denotes wholeness, organic unity, self-sufficiency and individual reality, so Schenker's theory of Fundamental Structure regards the unified masterpiece as an example of organic growth from background to foreground. Moreover, having been further elevated by virtue of its capacity to demonstrate tangible musical relations, analysis has in general retained an unswerving commitment to the cause of formal integration. And in this respect, both compositional intent and aesthetic prescription are held to exert a direct

influence on analytical judgement. For that matter the present theoretical enterprise which seeks to establish the connection between every aspect of form and structure could be seen as still trying to catch up with Schoenberg's creative preference for 'filling . . . in all the directions in which music expands' (Schoenberg 1975: 116).

In spite of such hardened convictions, a closer encounter with the music of modernity at least seems to give grounds for some uncertainty. One recent observation, by Peter Maxwell Davies, draws attention to this matter as the opportunity of avoiding that 'unifying confidence of outlook . . . which would be inimical to contemporary experience' (quoted in Griffiths 1982: 173). Furthermore the fact that Maxwell Davies offers this opinion in relation to a musical language – that of tonality, no less – identifies the issue not as vertiginous abstraction but as a practical concern. Historically speaking, it is easier to understand Webern's comparative lack of aesthetic disquiet: Schoenberg was still very much alive when the path to the new music was first cleared. Nonetheless the fact that this kind of traditionalist belief still represents the standard critical yardstick is something which cannot help but seem anachronistic in the face of subsequent compositional vicissitudes between the completely determined and the wholly random.

There can be little argument that theory and aesthetics alike are troubled by the prospect of musical equivocality and indeterminacy. In most respects this kind of reaction is understandable; once normative conditions have been unsettled or overrun, then their regulating power ceases to function. Yet expediency apart, it is precisely the intransigence of these validating principles that invites closer inspection. For instance, a reaction to aleatory experiment may well take the form of a reproach against misplaced negativity. Thus for Carl Dahlhaus

The polemics against cohesion in music . . . misses its target by confusing the abundance of relationships tied to the particularity of a unique work with the engrained elements of unification unacceptable in the violent drive toward loose anarchy. (1983: 38)

Here the indication is that aleatory scepticism fails to separate the contextual unity of a given work from the intrinsic relationships of any musical language and so overrides both. Although he provides no preliminary explanation for his decision, Dahlhaus seems to view these inbuilt connections (supposing they could be so easily specified) as somehow axiomatic. For the purposes of argument, all well and good. Yet what his proposition surely requires – but for whatever reason does not receive – is an account of why 'loose anarchy' should not simply set its own terms of reference; or conversely how the integrative properties of each and every musical language are held to be self-evident. In fact, pursuing Dahlhaus's idea further, the question does not appear to be one of such straightforward extremes: to take only one example, Maxwell Davies's preoccupation with 'multiple musical meaning' subscribes to an aesthetic of

ambiguity which refuses to accept any intrinsic limitations. Perhaps the conventions which bind the language of tonality are in fact sufficient to contain such departures as he and others propose. However, in the absence of firm evidence to support this conjecture, the conclusion one must draw is that, regardless of methodology, the standard critical response to such questions persists so doggedly because unity is thought to be somehow indispensable.

Throughout its various manifestations the established viewpoint would appear to endorse the following assertion by Adorno: that 'even the . . . extreme inconsistency and dissonance in non-conformist modern art cannot hide the fact that these moments belong to a unity. Without oneness they would simply not be dissonant' (1984: 225). Read for its orthodox content, Adorno's statement emphasises the familiar significance of unity as a foundational, synthesising condition. Disjunction, conflicts and diversities are thereby resolved within a single overall perspective. But is this line of reasoning, albeit customary, entirely justified? Should the priority of unity over disunity forever be accepted so easily and assuredly? In addition to his ostensible message, Adorno offers a salutary reminder that the difference between such antitheses is inscribed in each of them; one cannot exist without the other. Yet in its ceaseless flow towards reductionism, the music-analytical project seems to have worn smooth this distinction – in favour of unity – to the point of its becoming meaningless. What I want to suggest in this context is that, ubiquity apart, the unifying urge is by no means immune to doubt. Indeed, far from demonstrating its objectivity in every case, the same ideal constantly succeeds in exposing its own arbitrariness. By this reckoning, the championship of unity over diversity represents nothing other than a generalised state of false consciousness: illusion rather than reality. Nevertheless so much constitutes only the polemical contention. That which follows is one attempt at justification.

II

To rephrase Dahlhaus's observation, the principle of unity is itself an engrained element within the ideology of music theory past and present. On the one hand this might occasion praise, since theory could be taken to exhibit a commendable understanding of aesthetic speculation right from Plato and Aristotle, by way of German Idealism, through to latter-day structuralism and phenomenology. However, on the other hand, it does not follow that aesthetic principles forever arise from anterior philosophical concerns only to float free of them as the analytical context so often assumes. On the contrary, such laws were originally the product of metaphysical contemplation rather than disinterested detachment, a factor crucial to their pragmatic implications. For instance, the understanding of literary composition suggested by the Classical legacy merely confirmed the latter's use of a foundational reasoning to explain the lifeless – including artefacts – with regard to the living and the partial in relation to the whole. Similarly, a unitary interpretation of material substance was held to be as

necessary for Kant's formulation of the transcendental synthesis as it was for both Cartesian rationalism and Humean empiricism. Nonetheless a clear distinction did in fact open up between Kant's philosophical system and earlier systems, one which depended on the alliance of conceptual understanding with sensuous experience. The inspiration for this union came from the complementary notion of organic cohesion. Because just as nature and natural form gained in significance according to its resonance with subjective response, so it validated the power of human cognition to know and comprehend. Thus while the earlier idealists tried to make sense of both material reality and sensation as a specifically organic extension of mind alone, it was Kant's supposition that 'productive imagination' could serve as the verifying link between the *distinct* categories of noumenal and phenomenal which succeeded in transforming the relevance of aesthetic contemplation.

As Christopher Norris observes, aesthetic speculation, following its installation at the heart of philosophy of mind and knowledge, began to enjoy an increasing prominence, notably in the writings of Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Metaphysical interest correspondingly began to shift away 'from a critical account of reason, its constitutive powers and limits, to a kind of expressionist philosophising that [tried] . . . to make sense – narrative or mythical sense – of the various forms and manifestations of human creative activity' (1988: 33). Furthermore this tendency was by no means a matter of pure abstraction: the impact of social change had for some time contributed to a widespread need for cultural integration. In Jochen Schulte-Sasse's words, 'a relatively advanced degree of societal differentiation seems to have produced for the first time an *imaginary* perception of and desire for unity and unifying experiences' (1986: 104). On this count aesthetic gratification was expected to bear an unprecedented responsibility. For it was precisely 'the tension between a (psychological or political) desire for unity and harmony and the impossibility of realising it [which necessarily led] . . . to an imaginary sublation of that tension in the institution of art' (1986: 108). To elaborate this point a little, it was specifically the development of society towards the twin goals of independence and individualism which had brought about a divide between the regions of ethico-political and cognitive activity. Thus as Terry Eagleton notes, the ensuing difficulty of deriving 'values from facts' made imperative the institution of a new metaphysical scheme (1988: 84). Since the aesthetic provided a model of intuitive and autotelic coincidence it eventually became the basis of this system. Yet while Kant triumphed by consolidating the aesthetic faculty as the foundation of practical reason, he also succeeded in politicising it. For the possibility of reflecting culture in Nature immediately encouraged a hegemonic programme in the name of representational authenticity. Consequently all branches of the creative arts undertook to establish pride of place within the ideology of the social *Lebenswelt*.

Examples of this competitive quest for synthesis persist throughout the nineteenth century, most obviously in the critical theorising of the German Romantics. Indeed their reflections on the prospect of resolving the time-

honoured distinctions between such antitheses as universal and particular, objective and subjective, unified form and diversified content effectively represent the paradigmatic expression of transcendent reconciliation. Authoritative as this speculation may have been, the edifying influence of integration was held to reside as much in the act of reception as in production. For this reason the critical fragment was valorised as a way of inviting the active participation of the reader through a realisation of the form as both means and ends of thought – an organic cultivation of the inner spirit. As Kathleen Wheeler remarks, deeper understanding in these terms entailed the acceptance of paradox along with the mystical irresolution of profound insight; antinomies of whatever kind served only to show how the consciousness or ‘intellectual perspective’ of the mind of a genius ‘could provide the focus necessary to hold together an apparently miscellaneous content’ (1984: 16). Chief among these preoccupations was the commitment to symbolic over allegorical expression. Here the concepts of synthesis, organicism and creativity found their quintessential formulation. Because while the symbol might both signify and also vitally participate in the idea it represented, it could be seen as a ‘true part or . . . living fragment’ of that idea (Wheeler 1984: 10). On these grounds, it surpassed the arbitrary signification of allegory as a means of encapsulating the genuine duality of the artwork as subject-object, observer and observed.

The relevance of this critical patrimony for subsequent music-analytical concerns is cemented by the fact that it was during the same period that music gradually began to rival poetry as the apogee of aesthetic experience. Consequently music in turn was ultimately deemed to have achieved parity with ‘language in its symbolic mode . . . as a means of overcoming the otherwise insurmountable split between thought and perception, subject and object, concepts and sensuous intuitions’ (Norris 1988: 33). The implication of this association was inevitably similar: that by supposing an organic link with both perception and external reality, music too might be understood as capable of converting culture into nature. Thus following the general pattern of symbolic representation, music likewise became an authentic addition to the vocabulary of the aesthetic. And by extension it also formed part of that historical moment when social and political ideologies first employed their new language to mount what Eagleton calls a self-purgation ‘of ambiguity and alternative possibility’ in the hope of seeming as ‘innocent and unchangeable as Nature itself’ (1983: 135).

The influence of this strategy, while easy to perceive, is nonetheless impossible to gauge: altogether nothing short of Western history in its progress from the Enlightenment to the present day. Measured against the same scale, a preoccupation with the survival of the aesthetic *per se* might seem wholly inconsequential. However, the fecundity of the aesthetic as a breeding ground for the conflicting forces of conformism and critique continue to mark it out as a vital topic for intellectual debate. To pursue the most suggestive of Eagleton’s observations in this sphere, the very conceit of aesthetic judgement as being in some way disinterested hangs less on the potential for objective detachment than on a perpetual indifference to one’s own interests. More significantly still,

the wish to see that judgement reflected in the substance of reality can always be underwritten by commandeering the rhetoric of naturalistic representation. One need only recall the sentiments of Webern, Schoenberg, Höller and Langer which head this essay to appreciate the authoritarian hegemony of organicist thinking in this respect. Nor does the issue end there. As Joseph Kerman has argued, the wholesale belief in unity held by the music-analytical enterprise can also be regarded as an unreflective outgrowth of this same root metaphor. In fact, but for the preponderance of organicist attitudes, the consensus of opinion that surrounds 'the instrumental music of the great German tradition' could never be so strong (1980: 314). In Kerman's diagnosis, therefore, 'from the standpoint of the ruling ideology, analysis exists for the purpose of demonstrating organicism, and organicism exists for the purpose of validating a certain body of works of art' (1980: 315). His claim is not without some plausibility; even a brief recollection of Schenker's declarations on pre- and post-tonal as well as non-Germanic music automatically lends credence to this kind of supposition. But as Kerman implies, a castigation of Schenker alone would be equally wrong-headed on account of its culture-specificity. Instead his conclusion is that 'critics who differ vastly from one another in their methods, styles and emphases still view the work of art ultimately as an organism in this sense' (1980: 315). For there to be any hope of redemption from the perils of organicist dogma, analysts must work to develop a broader, more humane criticism, free from the formalist obsession which organicism promotes.

Standing back momentarily from Kerman's assessment, it is obvious that he allots greatest emphasis to the effect of naturalising metaphors on music analysis. The development of formalist doctrine and its consequent influence on historical focus are, in this respect, well observed. All the same, by choosing to overlook a variety of contingent circumstances, Kerman primes his interpretation with certain ambiguous lacunae. For example, while organicist thinking lies behind much of the latter-day devotion to formalism, it does not completely account for its prevalence. Most of those critics whose 'methods, styles and emphases' vary so widely rely on methodological criteria that purportedly have little to do with natural reference. Moreover, Kerman's reluctance to examine fully the terms and conditions that instigated the rise of organicist thinking leaves untouched the whole question of origins. If there is no indication of why this credo came into being, then surely any decisions as to when and how it might be abandoned would be equally arbitrary. In fact, far from conveying a demystifying intent, Kerman's ready acceptance of the German instrumental corpus as a primary instantiation of organicist ideals suggests an outright misrecognition of the latter's ideological implications. Rhetoric apart, his argument begins to look far less like criticism than complicity. For the time being, I would like to postpone detailed discussion of Kerman's position until a number of other issues have been aired. What these reservations should already have made plain, however, is that any determined challenge to aesthetic bias within the analytical orthodoxy must be far more extensive and exacting than Kerman apparently supposes.

III

The transference of the consideration of form from the sphere of aesthetic speculation into the precise and specific context of the analysis of actual compositions inevitably [leads] . . . to definitions which are statements of critical and analytical criteria. (Whittall 1980: 709)

Taking 'form' more generally in the sense of unity here, Arnold Whittall's words describe clearly the direction that the present objective should follow. Nevertheless it would be fatuous to attempt an exhaustive taxonomy of the resources which contribute to the impression of unified musical structure. In spite of this, a more cursory survey suggests that a number of interpretative terms and values are commonly assigned to the structural variables of melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, timbre and so on. As David Schiff notes, 'the main principle of logic in European music since Haydn has been that of theme and development' (1983: 36). That which Dahlhaus denigrates, *reductio ad absurdum*, as repetition, variation and contrast is thus the corollary of Schiff's division of thematic material 'into perfect and imperfect manifestations' of the same substance (1983: 36). Expanding this topic, it is the law of economy that then solicits the prospect of discovering palpable thematic interrelation. To echo Dahlhaus, 'that the component parts of which a form consists are shown . . . to be different expressions of the same substance, should be an explanation for the impression of conciseness which proceeds from the work' (1975: 12). Other parameters can of course be included at a comparable level of formal and methodological generality. For instance, as Schiff continues, thematic logic is in turn paralleled by 'the harmonic design of tonal music with its motion away from and back to the tonic' (1983: 37). Rhythm too is usually subsumed under this scheme; texture and timbre are perhaps regarded as less easily susceptible to similar treatment. Even so, given the necessary resource each part of a work may, in some form or another, be inspected as part of the catch-all analytical test for identity.

As painstaking as the identification of musical vocabulary may be, it cannot of itself satisfy the essentially syntactic concern with coherence. Attention to substantive criteria therefore goes hand in hand with a need to assess the functional role of the components so described. However, for Dahlhaus, it is this very form of exegesis that tends 'automatically towards a methodological axiom or prejudice which one might call the postulate of uninterrupted functionality' (1975: 10). Hence the observer is drawn to believe that 'every musical phrase should legitimize itself through the function which it fulfils in the whole of the work – as if uninterrupted functionality were the essence of aesthetic perfection' (1975: 10). If this tendency is to be resisted, Dahlhaus argues, then he or she must maintain an ever-vigilant sensitivity to provide the necessary checks and balances between meaningful association and well-meaning sophistry. At the same time, syntactic relations are operative principally on the level of structure; a successful demonstration of musical

cohesion also requires some scrutiny of formal articulation. On first acquaintance, it may seem that the relevance of this aspect is felt more or less acutely according to the importance placed on the processive character of a work. For example, Dahlhaus points up the dichotomy of living spirit (piece) and dead letter (analysis) which he regards as inevitable while methodology is 'oriented exclusively to an organic model' (1975: 18). Writing under the apparent impact of structuralist doctrine, Dahlhaus concludes that such a disparity can only be overcome by projecting the work as a textual model, rather than as the kind of corporeal form wherein true structure still belongs 'not to the means of expression, but to the expressed, to the signified rather than to the signifier' (Piaget 1971: 79). In this respect his attitude remains one of reform rather than revolution. For while structuralism may concentrate solely on form as a relational, rather than as an evolving, entity, its spirit is not entirely divorced from such homelier touchstones as proportion, balance and symmetry. Indeed their purpose is made explicit with reference to the Gestaltist notion of 'good' form and its influence on pattern recognition.

By no means an accident, the mistake that Dahlhaus makes is to remark a difference in kind and not degree between these two approaches. In actuality, having recognised the organicist urge to treat the work as an independent, symbolic artefact, he merely follows this line of reasoning through to its logical conclusion: that is, the rejection of its diachronic trappings in favour of a view of the text as a wholly synchronic structure. What this confirms is a definite failure to rethink the concept of integration. In effect, Dahlhaus manages only to reinstate his allegiance to traditionalist ideals: a warning against unremitting functionality, for instance, leaves untouched the fact that deliberation between the 'same' and the 'different' will, in all likelihood, ensure an approximation towards unity in diversity. In addition, by entering the structuralist debate, he highlights one way in which the terms of Kerman's argument can be extended. For although organicism forms the *fons et origo* of this prevailing authoritarian stance, its consequent mutation into the various strains of analytical theory and practice is at once intricate and diverse. Hence, as previously suggested, the fact of the matter is that a rigorous interrogation of the totalising drive towards unity – and the authentic self-knowledge that supposedly accompanies it – implies a much more searching form of critique than has so far been imagined. Getting out from under, in Kerman's phrase, effectively entails a cross-questioning of all those methodologies which differ so vastly from one another, whether or not their understanding of musical cohesion is in any immediate sense 'organic'.

IV

Moving from the general to the particular, it would first of all seem worthwhile to explore how the more familiar methodologies think to ground unity as an aesthetic principle. To begin with a hypothetical example, it is difficult to believe that unity might still be understood in any sense as a universal. In its

most literal cast, this idea would involve subsumption of a work under the concept of unity which, reciprocally, would substantiate its intelligibility. As Richard Rorty describes it, the formulation of this kind of archetype effectively involves lifting off a 'single property from something . . . and then [treating] . . . it as if it itself were a subject of predication, and perhaps also a locus of causal efficacy' (1980: 32). Inert as it may seem, the issue immediately becomes live when connected to the belief in music as 'pure form, liberated from any object or from matter' (Schelling 1981: 280). One need only then drop the empirical pretence of functionality to reanimate the 'methodological axiom and prejudice' which Dahlhaus so decries. For the record, this kind of abstract metaphysical thinking was common to both Schelling and Hanslick in the nineteenth century. As such it was vigorously denounced by Hegel as a confusion of art and science, where the former should instead cherish 'an interest in the object in its individual existence and . . . not struggle to change it into its universal thought and concept' (1975: 38). Though anxious to separate these categories, Hegel was insistent on a conception of the artwork as a perceivable manifestation of the absolute Idea. And it is the self-same reconciliation of abstract general with embodied particular that so effectively captures the mechanics of Schenkerian reduction. The Hegelian slant of Schenker's theory is well-enough known; the dialectical colour of its organisation has attracted frequent comment, not least because of the Chord of Nature which, like the Idea, 'can only enter the artistic consciousness by the expansion and further mediation of [its] . . . particular aspects' (Hegel, quoted in Solie 1980-1: 154). All the same, it is necessary to bear in mind the reconciliation of background (general) with foreground (particular) as the true idealist hallmark of his system. Indeed, to accommodate this scheme, Schenker's intellectual perspective on music underwent its own course of development away from perceptual progress in time towards conceptual progress in mind. Thus the life of the individual masterpiece and of musical history in general were both envisaged as the outcome of a Hegelian teleology, unfolding organically towards its inevitable end.

True to its idealist principles, Schenkerian theory is shot through with references to physical organic life; the importance of Nature for Hegel is translated into what Ruth Solie identifies as a conflation 'of temporal and logical priority' between the ontogenic (development of the individual organism) and phylogenic (development of the species) in Schenker's own version (1980-1: 153). However, it is not the case that an organicist outlook need hinge exclusively on a dynamic view of external reality. As Wheeler's account of the Romantic aesthetic indicates, this condition might equally be held to reside in 'the human reason's glorious power of non-empirical creative unifying vision' (Wimsatt 1972: 70), a belief substantially generated by the Kantian synthetic *a priori* as discussed above. Observed through Kant's synthetic lens, the merely physical organism can be seen to enjoy 'this character only by metaphoric extension and hence in a less exact degree' (Wimsatt 1972: 70). Because it is precisely the reciprocating relationship between consciousness and artefact that

fulfils the expectation of unity-in-variety and leads to the interpretation of each successful artwork as a complete structure. Although he does not make the matter entirely plain, Kerman too seems to recognise something of this distinction. For on these terms it could be that the (unwarranted) *a priori*, and not organicism *per se*, is a more discriminating reason for refusing to develop a critical attitude to ambiguity and irresolution. Hence, as Dahlhaus expresses the point: 'any listener accustomed to artificial music always presupposes the wholeness of a work, even a work quite unknown; and such a listener grasps details as parts of an expected coherence that includes the details and still proceeds from them' (1982: 77). Quite simply, 'details must be grasped as functions of the whole form, in order to attain unimpaired musical reality' (1982: 78).

By contrast, the empirically-minded analyst would be unlikely to regard such teleological or *a priori* arguments in favour of unity as anything more than tendentious. Rather the only faithful test would be one of inductive objectivity, a standard which, as William Wimsatt reflects, invites passive reception along with an altogether 'humbler sort of organicism' which 'attempts to proceed more tentatively in its enquiries' (1972: 78). Into this category, for example, might come pitch-class set theory and – notwithstanding its dynamic character – Meyer's implication-realisation model. All that is taken as given by these systems is therefore given to experience and not inferred. Even so, neither theory expects to give a point-by-point justification of the perceptual criteria supporting its analytical findings; each property is simply predicated of the work in hand. Granted Wimsatt's stipulations, it is still perhaps difficult to believe that criteria of whatever kind could prompt these or any other empirical methods to advocate a unified notion of structure with such habitual regularity. If the claim to objectivity is not just wilfully gainsaid, one must assume that empiricist theories are also conditioned by something like a strong element of psychological reflex in favour of formal closure.

The avoidance of such potential solecisms is largely what motivates music-semiotic study. Consequently the symbolic dissection of a neutral level restricts qualitative assessment to the identification of segments. On this count, the ordinary predisposition towards structural economy is permitted only as a higher-level construct; substantive reduction follows as a consequence of method rather than as predication of the object. This kind of procedure has in turn been popularised as the notion of plot, a manoeuvre which is, by extension, common to all analytical methodologies (see Nattiez 1985). According to Paul Ricoeur, the idea of plot represents a poietic or 'configurational dimension . . . which . . . construes significant wholes out of scattered events' (1980: 178). As interpretative gestures, plots are inherently subjective. Moreover, since styles of reasoning are by no means always commensurable, there are strong grounds to suppose that this issue is more complex than is currently believed. Nevertheless, the concept is valuable as a way of alerting attention to the perspectival nature of structural description.

V

A brief sketch of the analytical terrain therefore exposes a wide range of aesthetic persuasions. So described, the situation seems anything but radically conformist in outlook; on the contrary, the general picture is one of a healthy pluralism featuring freely competitive strategies. If this evidence can be accepted, then any likelihood of investigating further the predisposition towards musical unity appears to rest with the processes of dialectical critique. For example, one could ask how a universal interpretation of unity matches up with reality, or what exactly are the conditions under which the artist's consciousness is held, *a priori*, to promote synthesis and not wholesale contradiction. Every alternative so far discussed might therefore be brought before this tribunal; all that would remain unexamined are the knowledge-constitutive interests which use its investigative apparatus to bring out a particular solution on top. In other words, rational argument is customarily employed with no suggestion of the possibility that it too may be just another means of satisfying the desire for naturalised meaning. As such, dialectic represents the logical corollary of that aim originally located in the realm of the aesthetic. Ideology, wishing to establish itself once again as what Paul de Man terms the successful 'confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism' (1982: 11), thus confidently extends its authority into the realm of rational debate. Transparent in intention, this device is nonetheless obscure in its message. Because the medium through which the distorting effect of instrumental reason reveals itself is in fact that of language, specifically the non-coincidence of word and concept, signifier and signified. As it stands, the realisation is far from superficial: the whole of Western philosophy would seem to depend on the logocentric assumption that the categories of language are capable of articulating together in order to facilitate some discussion of thought and experience. Yet it is precisely because no intrinsic relation exists between these regions that each and every attempt at impartial, objective explanation must end in failure. Rather the surplus of figurative meaning always ensures that it takes pride of place. Therefore, however plausible they may appear, the apodictic truths of dialectic will inevitably be reduced to the status of rhetorical formulae while they seek some kind of grounding in language.

The most immediate truth to dawn from this conclusion is that neither concepts nor propositions but texts 'are the element within which philosophy must always work' (Norris 1985: 226). And as Norris remarks, theoretical reflection too forfeits any claim to emancipated knowledge unless it shows a willingness to acknowledge its own existence as 'a product of *textual* understanding' (1985: 38). Norris's response to this state of affairs is a deconstructive one, involving an approach implemented through the process of a rigorous close reading. Transferring his recommendation to the present context, textual critique would certainly appear appropriate to the demystification of methodological rhetoric; explanatory narratives – plots, more familiarly – are all but ubiquitous in the service of analytical demonstration, as will be made

clear below. But the same idea also circumscribes very well the more general predisposition that lies behind each of these narrative pronouncements: the inclination to regard any piece as a reified, finite entity. In effect, every composition becomes a solid structure – virtually indistinguishable from its notionally fixed representation in score. Furthermore the position cannot be said to change with respect to presentational medium: descriptive prose, analytical graph and sounding score are very much alike in perpetuating a formalist belief in each work as something hypostatized and distinct. Although only music semiotics and Dahlhaus's structuralist precepts designate this condition as textual, the current materialising habit is sufficiently widespread to falsify those counter-claims which otherwise hold analysis to be a purely perceptual act. On the contrary, the situation denotes a general practice of 'reading' which has finally squeezed out the temporal aspect of its subject-matter in the cause of objective reference and aesthetic autonomy. Thus, to echo Eagleton's diagnosis of poetry under New Criticism, the composition becomes 'a self-sufficient . . . spatial figure rather than a temporal process' (1983: 48), a transformation likewise born of the observer's wish to produce 'a format of strictly corrigible propositions' about an acknowledged masterpiece (Kerman 1980: 313).

Nor does this attitude exist in isolation. Instead the goal of formal integration draws analysts of all persuasions willingly on into the hermeneutic circle. Safe in the assumption that individual features and overall context must function mutually to ensure intelligibility, each interpreter encourages the circle to revolve from part to whole and back again. The unshifting holism which lies behind this approach correspondingly works to maximise the coherent and consistent sense generated by the activity of interpretation. In de Man's terms, musical, like literary form, thereby represents 'the result of the dialectic interplay between the prefigurative structure of the foreknowledge and the intent at totality of the interpretative process' (1983: 31). However, the point is not that analysts succeed in rendering the work complete, but that they forever fall under the integrative spell of their own hermeneutic impression. As Norris concludes, by mistaking the latter for the former, interpreters inveterately substitute their 'dream of unified perception for the discrete particulars of apprehended meaning' (1983: 124). Hence what begins in the name of verity descends repeatedly into the concealment of value judgement wherever the preservation of unity is at stake.

Naively reductionist as it may appear in the light of the above inferences, this assessment foregrounds the principle common to all strands of the music-analytical enterprise. Thus an apparent diversity of epistemological alternatives is ultimately bound together by the progression towards atemporal formalism, a doctrine whose authority increases across time, both conceptually and historically, from organicism to structuralism and beyond. It is this same formalist spirit that in Kerman's view is answerable for a continuing adherence to evolutionist accounts of musical development. While formalist and, more particularly, organicist attitudes are thought unshakable, attempts to investigate repertoire from outside the Austro-Germanic line must, he

maintains, fail to negate the suggestion of overly narrow traditionalism. To the contrary, the principle which still has to be grasped is that matter dictates manner, not vice versa; until then there can be no enlightened reinterpretation of any alternative musical heritage.

Although most analysts would probably want to contest the insinuation of critical short-sightedness, there is no conclusive evidence to be brought against Kerman's claim. The customary suspicion which surrounds evolutionary theories on the grounds of historical perspective does not alter the fact that formalist concepts inevitably work to assimilate every musical culture to the expression of a singular value. For example, it is difficult, in this regard, to deny the ready acceptance of a great central tradition running from Bach to Brahms and thence to Schoenberg, Berg and Webern. True, such a demarcation may be no more limiting now, geographically, than the Siegfried Line. Yet this in turn is only because the map of critical campaign shows blanket occupation by formalist forces. For Kerman, the surest way to relieve this interpretative domination is to develop a more humane form of criticism: essentially, a broader-based approach to historical influences. Rather than being permitted to annex every other contextual ground, organic unity could then be confined to the circumstances of its original currency. But in spite of these strictures, it is hard to accept that the introduction of, for instance, biographical or sociological details would be sufficient to dissolve the power of either hardened formalist theory or its hermeneutic analogue. So far as the prevailing ideology is concerned, manner exclusively governs matter. Moreover, as already mentioned, one cannot but ask under what conditions this process of re-evaluation might begin. With a particular composer, perhaps, or even a specific work? As Kerman views the issue, we all already 'know that [organicism] . . . is less important' for traditions other than the Germanic and so should try to interpret them differently (1980: 320). Yet even supposing a little critical scepticism, it is not made clear how, except, presumably, by subjective reckoning, one can be expected to 'know' the success or failure of organicism for one musical culture rather than another.

Swimming against the tide of belief in this fashion, there would seem to be no firm reason why the organicist credentials of every time and place should not be subjected to some degree of re-examination, if not also redefinition. However, Kerman's failure to reject organicism outright, along with his implied compartmentalisation of the German instrumental corpus, indicates that he feels certain exemptions should be observed. Possibly the fact that organicism played into that same corpus as a historical entity is taken as cause for exception; all the same, his recommendation in this quarter ultimately appears no less partial, ideologically, than any comparable formalist pronouncement. Neither is this impression in any way dispelled by the reformist slant of Kerman's argument. Once the originating sector of aesthetic history has been cordoned off, its real message is made clear: that selectivity and not humanity must continue to determine the interests of a better-informed historical narrative. The motivation for this conviction has already been hinted at: in effect, a

pragmatic attachment to the discriminatory power of the aesthetic. However, rather than remaining at the level of generalised abstraction, it will be better to elucidate this conclusion through a number of practical examples. The summaries that follow thus represent introductory close readings of several responses to the notion of critical change.

VI

Aesthetic harmony, therefore, is one moment among others, whereas traditionally it was regarded as privileged. Traditional aesthetics falsely inflates what is a relation into an absolute whole or totality, thus turning harmony into a triumph of heterogeneity and an emblem of illusory positivity. (1984: 225-6)

This quotation from Adorno, received in the wake of his earlier synthetic adherence, offers a positive, if disconcerting, pre-echo of Kerman's subsequent representation. While serving characteristic notice of the double-edged force attaching to negative dialectics, Adorno's statement also acknowledges the changes dictated by a modernist context. Thus as Wolfgang Iser describes the terms:

If a modern work of art is to succeed in communicating even a partial reality, it must still carry with it all the old connotations of form, such as order, balance, harmony, integration etc. and yet at the same time constantly invalidate these connotations. (1978: 12)

Altogether the brief is unequivocal: innovation and iconoclasm set the tone of contemporary art, hence criticism must face up to new responsibilities. Critically speaking, it is perhaps not advisable simply to declare every departure a challenge to received opinion; for instance, the use of collage/montage, the potential kinetic distinction notwithstanding, might be seen as an enhancement of continuity by one commentator and a disruptive, anti-autonomous gesture by another (Schiff 1983: 40; Lessem 1982: 535). Nevertheless, the most far-reaching significance attaching to a modernist aesthetic is that such differences of opinion are at all possible. No longer pressed into the Procrustean bed of traditionalism, the observer is free to realise that 'the juxtaposition and superimposition of different elements may be a more natural and necessary way of appreciating and describing . . . content . . . than unity or synthesis' (Whittall 1987: 15). Disjunction will only attract the reproofs of incoherence and inferiority if consistency is held to be absolute. Moreover, as the spearhead of revolution, radical criticism inevitably turns its attention towards history, a move which threatens further disruption. For in a climate of ambiguity, it is unlikely that the search for precedents and wrong turns would leave Classical precepts – much less casual assumptions – undisturbed.

Revisionist attitudes of this kind surface in several recent articles which focus on music either side of the break with tonality (Dunsby 1983a; Whittall 1983 and 1987). In his consideration of musical unity, Roman Ingarden refers in passing to Chomiński's hypothesis that Chopin's twenty-four piano Preludes form, in some sense, a single, unified artwork (1986: 132, n.4). This theory provides a striking anticipation of the phenomenon that Jonathan Dunsby terms a multi-piece: in sum, a collection of separate short pieces which together invite examination of their corporate structure. Although devoted to structural properties, Dunsby's main purpose is diachronic rather than synchronic, professing 'an historical end: the better understanding of an aspect of Brahms's form' (1983a: 167). Better understanding in this respect hinges on the fact that a preoccupation with whole pieces 'has diverted our attention from an interest in music in sections which do not make a whole in every sense' (1983a: 167). As Dunsby sees it, the obsession with completeness bears a latent irony, since the presentation of most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music is reliant on an intrinsically sectional, multi-movement design. Thus if Beethoven's symphonic structures can be taken as more integrated than those of his predecessors or contemporaries, he argues, it may follow that the individual movements themselves are less integrated than the Classical aesthetic permitted.

Taking up a position similar to that of Kerman, Dunsby applies further critical leverage by noting the formal and geographical prejudice which sees merely an evolutionary integrative stimulus behind the sequence of one-movement works from Schubert to Schoenberg. Not only does this conception rely on over-simplification of development within multi-movement forms, he observes, but it also implies indifference to the varied grouping of instrumental miniatures over the same period. For example, works such as *Kreisleriana* and *Carnaval* indicate that one composer at least was alive to the possibility of combining small-scale components to produce a larger whole. Yet analysts could scarcely seem more reluctant to probe the general correlations that might exist *between* formal extremes. In Dunsby's view, what this evidence corroborates is 'the poverty of the proposition that music either does or does not make a whole' (1983a: 168), a condition exacerbated by the present critical inclination. In some respects this is unsurprising; analysts who are content to operate around a theoretical void may well be unlikely to perceive any reason for change. However, without further attempt at codification, they must expect to encounter deeper as well as more frequent pitfalls when seeking to come to terms with the nineteenth-century legacy.

Concerned to treat this problematic space more effectively, Dunsby proposes that part of it be filled by the multi-piece, a genre independent of the multi-movement piece on the one hand and the collection on the other. As he admits, this new model, although more inclusive than the prevailing one, still shows some coarseness. But then the difficulty of assimilating a recalcitrant area of the repertoire has often forced commentators into a degree of theoretical imprecision. The example of variation, Dunsby suggests, provides a good case in point: in this context even a theory as powerful as Schenker's gives no

definitive account of the way in which variation form and structure correspond. Like so many others, Schenker was willing to tolerate such inadequacies; his traditionalist faith in unity seems to have rendered further speculation unimportant. By contrast the multi-piece constitutes an innovative departure. Therefore, even if its initial implications remain obscure, it still holds out the prospect of redressing received standards.

In spite of its seeming independence, Dunsby's theory does not emerge *ex nihilo*. A precedent for alleging structural integration among collections is cited in the work of Rudolph Réti. Based on the postulate of a 'higher architectural whole formed from a common thematic material' (quoted in Dunsby 1983a: 172), Réti's analyses include examples not only from Brahms (Op. 79) but also from the piano collections of Schumann, these latter lying 'somewhere between mere suites on the one hand and genuine variations on the other' (quoted in Dunsby 1983: 172). Having noted the heuristic success of Réti's investigations, Dunsby's own analysis centres on Brahms's Op. 116, 'the collection most obviously unified by the kinds of structural process found in multi-movement pieces or, indeed, in single pieces' (1983a: 173-4). The matter of demonstrating a large-scale integrative design for the set is then levelled against the discrepancy between integration and closure which attaches to a multi-movement work. For what appears flexible more than dogmatic in this quarter is, ordinarily speaking, absolute with regard to a collection: that its individual components should be self-sufficient. However, if, for the sake of argument, they seem not to be complete, Dunsby advises that 'we may justifiably look for their completion . . . later in the collection' (1983a: 176); the single qualification to bear in mind is that any kind of integrative procedure is unlikely to be consistent. The strongest discernible link in Op. 116 is reckoned to be between Nos 1 and 4, a relation which suggests the later elaboration of an initial implication. Following this, the same association is then taken to prolong a chain of correspondence, one which fulfils itself only in the penultimate and final pieces. Still more compelling for Dunsby in this respect is the degree of resemblance which marks the first and last items: key (D minor), rhythmic patterning, harmonic detail and time signature all support the impression of similarity. Even so, he is quick to admonish interpreters against any over-enthusiasm which might overtake them, recommending instead that caution should attend the identification of consistent and continuous elements 'since from one point of view it is precisely lack of contrast which ought to characterize collections rather than multi-pieces' (1983a: 180). Here the reasoning is that a group of similar pieces is likely to be used in similar ways. Correspondingly, critical vigilance should be alert to the fact that it is 'the tension between contrast and unity' that marks 'long-term logic' (1983a: 180). On these terms 'the elements of unity . . . may appear in genuine collections, as they do usually in variations, but not in combination with a deeper level of unity' (1983a: 180). Because in extended tonal structures it is specifically 'the interaction of levels that is considered a sign of musical richness and coherence' (1983a: 180).

Having established a context within which to work, Dunsby turns to the

subject of thematic interrelation. Significance in this case is thought to lie 'not so much in the mere presence of thematic materials of a rather basic kind . . . but in the structure of themes as combinations of these materials' (1983a: 183). As he continues, 'the essence of the [motivic] analysis here is to show that the fundamental materials are related in something like the way to be found in conventional large forms' (1983a: 184). Consequently the appearance of cells on various levels and in various combinations is felt sufficient to stand as an instance of 'Brahms's motivically taut compositional practice' (1983a: 184). Nonetheless, far from providing an end in itself, the discovery of one kind of hierarchical structuring inevitably leads on to the general question of unity and hence 'whether it is permissible to interpret Op. 116 as a large tonal form' (1983a: 184). With regard to its various aspects the set is already distinguished from a collection; even so, Dunsby observes that it is still far from obvious as to how an overall tonal scheme might be expressed. Pursuing this matter, he notes that in 'single tonal forms, part of the work of analysis is to provide an articulation of the music' (1983a: 184). Thus although no connection is made, his sentiment recalls Webern's belief that 'the primary task of analysis is to show the functions of the individual sections' (1963: 57). However, taking the issue further, he concludes that the relevant factors behind the interpretation are not merely formal, but concern more directly 'the interaction of the various structural variables' (1983a: 184). The puzzle of how to articulate these elements in the present context – whether to honour the existing division by piece, or to assert a 'large form' which preserves boundaries wherever appropriate – leads to the most important of Dunsby's conclusions: that traditional assumptions are forced inside-out by the very likelihood of interconnection within a multi-piece. Thus:

The idea that the articulation between one piece and another could be considered less pertinent than the articulation between tonal regions within one piece presents the most radical challenge to the conventional notion about how such pieces come to be published together. (1983a: 185)

From this standpoint he then proceeds to join the constituent items in their usual sequence. And what this unveils is a goal-directed structure in D minor which 'depends fundamentally on the relationship between the keys of the pieces' (1983a: 186). To this end the solution is held to gain in plausibility by comparison with the other sets of Brahms's late maturity, surpassing as it does their inferior instances of key patterning. Uniquely, therefore, the Op. 116 group exhibits that mode of technical craftsmanship which was the composer's 'normal way of controlling a large time-span in unified works' (1983a: 186).

In spite of its apparent success, Dunsby advocates that this outline for the multi-piece be treated with circumspection. Because given the circumstances, 'It would be ironic if the surprising discovery of a certain structural unity applied to a group of pieces where there were no signs of aesthetic balance' (1983a: 186). Consequently he adopts the notion of first-movement sonata form

as gestural model, variations of which are exemplified by multi-movement sonatas and extended one-movement pieces. The outcome is an effective telescoping of sonata-allegro, scherzo, slow movement and finale underpinned by the harmonic scheme common to sonata. At the same time, it would still be wrong, in Dunsby's view, to interpret this formal precedent paradigmatically. Quite simply, 'The nature of the unity of . . . collections need not be the same in each case, and it may be this proviso beyond any other that has been forgotten' (1983a: 187). For Dunsby any worthwhile investigation of multi-piece organisation must be ready to look beyond the limits of generic simplification towards the question of historical significance. For abstruse as they may have been, Brahms's creative practices were not without effect on his successors. Thus if we are prepared even to consider that the collections of the Second Viennese School also depend in some way on the concept of a multi-piece, then 'there may be yet more to learn about Brahms's influence in the twentieth century' (1983a: 189).

Like Dunsby's argument, that developed by Arnold Whittall takes its initial inspiration from an instrumental miniature. However, the purpose in this case is not expressly to demonstrate the cohesion, innovatory or otherwise, of a particular work. Instead the mode of integration found in Webern's Op. 7, No. 3 merely acts as a focus for a review of the disparity between the composer's professed aesthetic and the characteristics of musical modernism. As mentioned above, Webern's ideas were, in this respect, entirely typical of the Second Viennese attitude to tradition. By this scheme of reckoning, the values of innovation and integration held equal sway; hence serialism came to represent an advance on the music of atonality insofar as it promised 'a new kind of all-embracing unity and coherence' (Whittall 1983: 733). For Webern himself, Whittall notes, unity was ultimately revealed as the essential prerequisite of musical meaning, a belief which scholars of his music have been happy to endorse. As a result, critical opinion sides with the composer's evolutionist account of his development. Indeed it is from this position that such procedures as seem unclassifiable within Webern's pre-serial works have sometimes been interpreted not only as compositional idiosyncrasies, but also as indices of analytical limitation.

Having registered the favourable disposition of most analytical systems towards unity as both a technical and an aesthetic property, Whittall goes on to draw closer attention to other, less conformist accounts of modernist culture. According to these readings, disruption and not continuity is the essence of contemporary radicalism. Therefore it is the 'urge to fragmentation' that maintains ascendancy, a state whose oppositions are best described as symbiotic, rather than organic, in kind. Biologically speaking, symbiosis entails 'the mutually beneficial partnership between elements of different kinds' (1983: 734); consequently Whittall takes its aesthetic corollary to mean that 'a "modernist" balance of discontinuities . . . can function as a positive, constructive aesthetic principle, creating new kinds of coherence rather than a single kind of incoherence' (1983: 735). Because of their own aesthetic

conservatism, theorists have so far neglected this line of reasoning. Yet in Whittall's view, the analysis of symbiotic forces need not seem incompatible with orthodox demonstrations of unity; for that matter the two could be combined as foreground and background. Furthermore the difficulties which beset the search for common ground between post-tonal languages might well be circumvented by an approach which examines their contrasting categories in the context of surface polarity. Although nowhere so authoritative, for instance, as Schenker's grasp of tonality, this proposition still addresses itself to those 'fundamental forces which persist from work to work' (1983: 735). As such, its execution need not be complex or even wholly divorced from existing models. The main requirement is that it attend to those elements which might appear unresolved and therefore contradictory.

To add practical substance to his speculation Whittall examines several facets of surface structure in Webern's Op. 7, No. 3. And from the various juxtapositions uncovered he infers that the piece is in fact an early example of the simultaneous opposition principle that Schiff perceives in the music of Elliott Carter. Bearing in mind Webern's professed leanings, Whittall describes the composer's practice as modern rather than modernist: that is, despite the use of non-traditional language, his 'traditional concern with unity as an overriding structural and aesthetic principle remains intact' (1983: 736). But the same conclusion does not alter the fact that such 'distinct, definable technical functions . . . as are evident in tonal music' do not carry over into free and twelve-note atonality (1983: 736). Because 'however persistent the elements of the old techniques', in this context 'the old functions, and with them the old aesthetics, cannot possibly survive' (1983: 737). For his own part Webern chose to disregard all countervailing evidence; yet his recusancy is really no better or worse than that critical tendency which still steadfastly subordinates contrast to the rule of unity. To this end pre- and post-tonal languages would continue to be understood as one. However, as Whittall sees it, willingness to question received wisdom might yet stand to uncover atonality as not just opposed, but 'truly and positively complementary to tonality' (1983: 737). Consequently those who had originally thought to regard its structure as something unexceptional might become less eager to show just 'how one thing leads to another' (1983: 737).

Concerned to explore this prospect further, Whittall has gone on to develop several of its themes from a specifically historical perspective. Although largely preoccupied with the difference between old and new in the music of today, he notes how the 'theorist's sense of history' so often denotes a 'classicising' urge: in short, 'the tendency of theorists to believe that a very real historical continuity requires even the newest theories to show essential structural similarities to the old' (1987: 5). Once again, this is all well and good in the interests of traditionalism. But if, by the same token, that theory continues to seek 'an integrated interpretation of its subject matter', then it is always likely to be uneasy in dealing with much of the music of the Romantic and post-Romantic eras, 'where the pre-eminence of integration, or even of linear connection,

cannot invariably be presumed' (1987: 5). On these terms, Whittall brings the lessons of modernism to bear as a way of contesting historical over-familiarity. Hence, in the present context, the conviction that tensions of substance rather than style are the province of atonal experiment should not obscure the creative discovery of irreconcilability as a nineteenth-century phenomenon. That which is characteristic of Webern and the present reaches back to Wagner and beyond. Yet to attain this understanding, the interpretative instinct must from the outset aspire towards a realisation of 'what aspects of the old music in question are of central theoretical concern' (1987: 4). A truly informed perspective therefore comes ultimately to depend less on logical consistency than on the flexibility of one's attitude to the apparent relation between past and present, old and new.

For instance, given the extended palette of modernist resource, Whittall argues, it is unlikely that contemporary styles might bear more than a passing resemblance to one another. Thus Stravinsky's neo-classicism promotes a balance of diversities which contrasts plainly with Webern's 'essential traditionalism – his classicism' (1987: 7). Moreover the belief in a latter-day period of common practice is in fact sustained only by the negative certainty that no one form of strong, hierarchical integration exists. So it is that Schenkerian theory succeeds in highlighting the absence of a comparable unity between tonality and atonality. For Whittall the same is also true of those works which are currently thought to have achieved a synthesis of the two. Far from accepting the terms of bland continuity, analysts should be confident that an articulation of the tensions and ambiguities found, say, in Berg's Violin Concerto will not have the affect of reducing it 'to the status of a *Merzbild*, a mere collage' (1987: 9). As he explains, anti-organicism used in this respect does not mean 'that the various elements used in a composition may have absolutely nothing to connect them, but that some kind of contradiction of language occurs which makes analytical demonstrations of interruption or suspension take priority over demonstrations of connection' (1987: 9). Rather than supplying the terms of its own homogeneity, therefore, context provides a potent source of conflict. Even motivic correspondence may itself become an agent of disruption, a feature which Whittall illustrates with reference to Berg's treatment of Bach's chorale harmonisation in the same piece. Hence his eventual conclusion that this work, like the row on which it is based, represents a creative acceptance of the 'structural irreconcilability of triadic consonance . . . and serially ordered total chromaticism' (1987: 12).

In summary, Whittall concludes, the essential facility which the theorist must bring to the musical result is 'a sense of history both segmented and stratified, like the music itself: a sense of the deep divisions between particular periods of time' (1987: 14). Technical progress is seldom straightforward. Correspondingly 'history – even the history of art – is also about lack of reconciliation and the music theorist needs to be able to sense when this is so' (1987: 14). As Whittall sees it, the entire course of theoretical development has been one of 'how theorists have used their gradually acquired and ever-increasing historical awareness, and of how that awareness has affected their response to the music of

their own time' (1987: 19). Conversely those accusations which suggest that analytical engagement entails removal from history are in truth without foundation. Indeed on this point Whittall's own stance is resolute: 'that we do not effect this removal because we cannot, and that not to make constant reference to one's awareness of context, or to one's critical response, is not to prevent those features from playing a major part in the analytical process' (1987: 19). As it is, the theorist will always be bound to take notice of contingent historical issues, whether consciously or unconsciously. Rather if any genuine warning has yet to be heeded, then it concerns the music of the present. For it is here that unquestioning conformism, without regard for evidence, is still likely to behave as if its own contemporaneity is in essence, 'and in all its aspects, no different from that of earlier times' (1987: 20).

VII

To most intents and purposes, this concludes the case for the challenge to tradition. For Whittall as well as Dunsby the exercise may be summed up in Adorno's phrase as a refusal 'to assume tacitly that the survival of art is unproblematic' (1984: 464). However, even a general survey of the work in hand is enough to show that their ostensible concerns are not devoted exclusively towards this end. Instead the abstract benefits of aesthetic redefinition are consistently evaluated against the practical demands of analytical explanation. In this way theoretical speculation is made to honour its customary allegiance to the descriptive and judicial aspects of critical reflection. Roughly speaking, the differences that appear in their work are those between what Dahlhaus calls 'theoretically oriented analysis [which] treats a piece of music . . . as testimonial for facts outside itself or for a rule transcending the single case' (Whittall) and 'aesthetically oriented analysis [which] . . . understands the same piece as a work complete in itself and existing for its own sake' (Dunsby) (1983: 9-10). This separation bears out the general distinction that obtains between a theory whose method is 'to extract a rich concept . . . from thin little bits of evidence . . . by imposing a formal structure on enough bits' (Rorty 1980: 260) and a critical approach which 'does its job most effectively where it confines itself to describing, interpreting or analysing the distinctive features of individual works of art' (Norris 1985: 124).

But however else these arguments may be regarded, the question most pertinent to the current enquiry is how far they can be said to follow Kerman's prescription on the necessity of assimilating history. In view of the apparent overlap of principles between all three commentators, a straightforward answer ought not to be difficult to reach. Certainly Dunsby and Whittall each make clear their individual commitment to a diachronic purpose. And taken together their respective theses provide an even stronger foil. Thus, for example, Dunsby's condemnation of an evolutionist outlook is given added depth by Whittall's 'segmented and stratified model'. And the lack of reconciliation

which Whittall refers to within the history of art finds good reason for Dunsby's refusal to erect the example of Brahms's Op. 116 into a paradigmatic scheme for the multi-piece. Altogether the inclination to suit the aesthetic word to the analytical deed results in a firm disavowal of unreflecting conformism on both sides. Yet deliberate though the outcome may appear, can its actual formulation be said to satisfy Kerman's criteria for a humane criticism, a genuine 'amalgam of analysis and historical studies' (1985: 228)? Here the answer must be negative. For as they stand, these joint solutions betray little or no evidence of sub-disciplinary cross-fertilisation; criticism, in the broad-based, practical vein advocated by Kerman, is altogether conspicuous by its absence. On this count there seems to be no real cause to believe that the 'platform of insight into individual works of art' as constructed by Dunsby and Whittall rests on anything other than a formalist foundation (Kerman 1985: 154). True, this reading of their intentions depends on taking a sceptical view of Whittall's insistence that historical context and critical judgement always inform the analytical act. All the same, his guiding concept of a disjointed historical narrative does not automatically falsify its interpretation as a modified extension of formalist dogma. Instead, for him and Dunsby alike, informed perspective only functions as the further – albeit carefully regulated – adjunct of a 'background of ramified theory' (Dunsby 1983b: 116).

By dictating the terms of history in this fashion, atemporal formalism discovers an even more effective way of ensuring its autocracy. The point is worth emphasising if only because it endorses the assertion made above against the reforming potential of historical influence *per se* to overturn the ruling ideology. In this respect what Dunsby and Whittall prove is just how easily Kerman's initiatives can be redirected to more familiar ends. The process of appropriation even involves a similar pattern of denunciation: thus organicist thinking once again condemns itself as unguarded prejudice. At the same time the motivation behind this denunciation is not to endanger the formalist orthodoxy, but to warn it against the threat of critical blindness. Ironically enough, this latter failing is clearly illustrated by an article which attempts to use biographical information as a means of underwriting analytical insight (Baker 1982). Confronted by a work which juxtaposes technical experiment with vivid programmaticism, James M. Baker chooses to regard Webern's Six Pieces for Orchestra, Op. 6, as a highly unified cycle. In his own words, from the composer's frequent references to their genesis 'it is evident that the pieces of the set arose from a single, evolving compositional concept, a concept which took shape during a period of retreat devoted especially to the memory of his mother' (1982: 2). Nevertheless, despite Baker's assurance the documentary evidence is by no means unequivocal: in fact Webern made a number of conflicting statements about the work. For instance, his remark to Schoenberg that 'I am writing a cycle of orchestra pieces; rather, I should say, it just happens to turn out this way' and the subsequent comment that 'a thematic connection does not exist, not even within the individual pieces' both undermine the possibility of a unifying interpretation (quoted by Baker 1982: 2). By his

resultant supposition that 'a mode of expression entailing continual change would seem to be at odds with the cyclic process so essential to the realisation of his [Webern's] program' (Baker 1982: 2), however, it is obvious that Baker has less regard for the disruptive potential of Webern's intentions. On the contrary, it is the composer's repeated pronouncements on the value of unity which most vividly colour his judgement.

Having laid out these assumptions, Baker sets out to ascertain the effect of non-repetition on musical coherence. To this extent his aim appears ambitious: an attempt to explore the integrative limits of a post-tonal language. In practice, however, the methodological procedure is nowhere so enlightened; in sum it forms an example of unthinking conformism. For instance, in the early stages of analysis the contextual similarity of related and unrelated pitch-class sets is felt to encourage the 'belief that the cyclical connections among the pieces of the set, and indeed the very coherence of the work as a whole are determined directly and specifically by pc-set correspondences' (1982: 6). Hence Baker immediately runs the principle of substantive unity together with the possibility that the pieces themselves might be structurally related; for him the two issues are all but inseparable. Generally speaking the proposition is not unsound; indeed the evidence that Baker presents might justifiably lend support to his conclusion that 'on the largest level . . . the set of pieces is extraordinarily unified' (1982: 24). Yet as Dunsby's reflections on the multi-piece show, the grounds for this kind of assumption are really far less concrete than is usually imagined. In truth there is simply no reason, still less a necessity, to infer unity of form from that of structure. What Baker ultimately fails to convey is any concomitant impression of formal – and, in Whittall's understanding, linguistic – ambiguity. Instead his all-embracing conception of cyclical organisation automatically subsumes every anomalous feature within an ideal whole whether or not it seems to promote cohesion.

A focus on pivotal elements containing large numbers of prominent sets – in Op. 6, No. 4 and, more importantly, Op. 6, No. 1 – serves a special function in this regard. Its particular significance becomes clear when Baker reveals that 'the formal significance of each event is determined by its place in a complex network of motivic relations. . . . This is variation form at its most subtle and sophisticated' (1982: 26). The statement itself is altogether exceptional. But more remarkable still is the lack of any further explanation. Without overstating the point, the case of tonal variation – witness Dunsby's observations – is insufficiently understood. So how the technique might then be transferred, without comprehensive review, to an atonal context is scarcely conceivable. For Baker, however, the need for vindication seems as inessential to this issue as it does to the association of foreground diversity with psychological behaviourism. So it is that the set-structural correspondences of the second and fourth pieces assume a free-associative status where 'there can be no doubt that the allusion to the funeral march in the second piece signifies the composer's realization of his mother's death' (1982: 5). Once more the inescapable impression is that a superficial grasp of intent begs too many questions – in this instance, of

presupposing that language 'poetic or otherwise can say any experience, of whatever kind, even a simple perception' (de Man 1983: 232). As de Man, taking to task the arch-formalists of literary criticism, points out, 'instead of containing or reflecting experience, language constitutes it. And a theory of constituting form is altogether different from a theory of signifying form' (1983: 232). In Baker's case extramusical signification is reserved as a final means of absorbing extraneous detail into the autonomous whole. Critically humane as it may be, there is nothing further to be learnt from the opinion that the composer's dedication of the Six Pieces to Schoenberg represents a masterly transformation of this relationship from texture to structure (1982: 26-7).

In sum, Baker's convictions provide a vivid illustration of the doctrines which constitute the interdenominational liturgy of latter-day theory. As such his standpoint is no more dogmatic than that of most other formalists. For Dunsby and Whittall, however, it is this kind of orthodox interpretation that is most likely to fall prey to the voice of critical reason. Alert to the supplementary potential of an approximate historicism, each capitalises on the fact that the means and ends of informed perspective can both be put to use in the interests of a superior formalist product. And the result is that those forces which threaten to overwhelm intransigents like Baker are rendered completely subservient. As previously outlined, the central point thus becomes the capacity of (reorganised) formalist concepts to contain and eventually suppress the unsettling effects of temporality in a way which renders any form of humane compromise impotent. On this count, the victories of Dunsby and Whittall over Kerman are those of dispossession. By contrast Baker's attitude is innocent of conflict. Yet vulnerable though his thesis is, its casual use of psycho-biographical details also emphasises the inherent weakness of a historicist position *per se*. The upshot of these conclusions is that, far from indicating a way out from under, Kerman's own ideological jurisdiction is ultimately subordinated to that of the analytical enterprise. Previously antithetical, it eventually surrenders all independence. Moreover, although his explicit claim may be to the contrary, the initial propagator of this heterogeny – heterosis – is really Kerman himself. Because having sought to denounce the survival of formalism, it is he who then refuses to disinter its organic roots. Lured by the spell of authenticity, therefore, Kerman too becomes an accomplice to that purposive misrecognition of culture and nature which turns on the role of the aesthetic.

VIII

If any counter-argument is to succeed in resisting the drift towards formalism, then it must begin by anatomising the function of the aesthetic. Thus circumventing Kerman's blindspot, it becomes clear that the mystified state of organicist consciousness originally evolved from the supposed capacity of the aesthetic to heal the division between subject and object through a final, transcendent reconciliation of sensuous cognition with conceptual understand-

ing. Equally plain is the fact that faithful realisation of the aesthetic depended on confirmation of the symbol – a fusion of signification with participation – as the only genuinely self-present mode of expression. As a result the blurring of language and reality became the primary model for converting culture into nature, a fact true of every additional bias clustered around Kant's primary formulation. In each of these cases, faith in a perfect communion between mind and nature encouraged the impression of unified perception. And it was this vision, this confidence in the fidelity of speculation, that in turn gave rise to the power of formalism.

Reversing the definition, therefore, the essence of formalism can be seen as the symbolic wish to identify the wholeness and integrity of the interpretative image with that of the work itself. To this end, insight seems unimpeachable while the idealised balance between word and world is preserved. Yet it is precisely by disturbing this 'high-romantic dream of origins, truth and presence' that the work of Paul de Man delivers its most disruptive impact (Norris 1988: 34). Initially concerned to dislocate the 'organicist metaphors [and] . . . images of self-sufficient unity and form prevalent among the American New Critics' (Norris 1982: 103), de Man's arguments reach out to confront the penchant for naturalised meaning thrown up by all forms of unreflective ideology. At the centre of this dispute is his advocacy of allegory as the 'one authentic mode of reading in so far as it acknowledges the inevitable failure of all attempts to make meaning coincide with the realm of intuition or phenomenal self-evidence' (Norris 1988: 41). Allegory thus emerges as a genuine, open-ended process of thought which controverts all possibility of symbolic coalescence within a 'pure, intuitive merging of subject and object' (Norris 1982: 103). However forceful 'the aesthetic disdain of "superfluous intentions" not "realised" in the perceptible shape of a work' (Dahlhaus 1983: 54), de Man categorically rejects the likelihood that symbolic representation, artistic or otherwise, can ever succeed in attaining a final 'hypostatic union between thought, language and reality' (Norris 1988: 34). Instead the attempt to read allegorically will always involve an acceptance of the truth that 'understanding is a *temporal* process, one that takes place not on the instant of punctual, self-present perception but through a constant anticipatory awareness of what is lacking in the present' (Norris 1988: 41; my emphasis).

Allegorical interpretation arises from a recognition of the artwork as an artificial construct in which meaning automatically depends on some form of continuous narrative or temporal unfolding. As Norris explains, by contrast with symbolic understanding, it abandons the notion that signs must point back to some 'ultimate source in the nature of "organic" or phenomenal perception' (1988: 34). In addition, the repudiation of any inherent coincidence between language and reality entails that a firm distinction be drawn between the concept of experience and its possible representation; since words are arbitrary signifiers, as de Man has it, they allow of no privileged access to perception. It is on these grounds that allegory works to complicate the (Romantic) Symbolist belief in a natural congruence between sign and meaning. Furthermore, by

relinquishing a dogmatic insistence on organic correspondence, the same trope also exposes the strategic immobilisation of history which forms the additional *political* edge of a Symbolist ideology. By contrast, allegory advances its own semantic discontinuity as incontrovertible proof that historical events should not be understood teleologically as the outcome of natural laws whose ultimate origin lies somewhere within a mythical past.

For de Man the strength of allegorical understanding resides in its ability to reverse even the broadest sweep of this ideological tide. However, still among the most obdurate manifestations of a Symbolist aesthetic are those which surface under the guise of formalist criticism. Faced with this situation, allegorical reasoning is unequivocal: that such closure as can be created by a formalist reading is inevitably premature. Interpretation may profess to attain a point of self-sufficient equipoise; but the impression of unity which it generates depends entirely on naturalised habits of response that ignore every hint of internal disruption. Allegory obeys no similarly preconceived order of aesthetic harmonisation. Instead it works to problematise the material resistance within the artwork as a means of emphasising the disparity between the latter's manifest ambiguity and the self-reflexive, containing drive of a traditional, formalist conception. In allegorical terms, the unquantifiable plurality of signification, whether musical or linguistic, remains intractable in the face of forcible reification. Consequently interpretation is understood less as a matter of forging a path (*pace* Webern) than as one of being drawn into labyrinths of structural 'undecidability' where 'any kind of systematic truth-claim could only tell the story of its own undoing' (Norris 1985: 29).

Therefore, far from seeming at their most lucid when presenting a synthesis of disparate evidence, Symbolist interpreters appear to suffer the greatest delusion in believing that any reading could ever amount to more than one part of an 'endless reflection on . . . the textual aberrations of sense' (Norris 1985: 41). Ironic as it may appear, however, allegorists are, at least in principle, capable of empathising with this position. As they well appreciate, the difficulty of coping with a pervasive ambiguity turns readers all too easily into victims, a situation which actually *impels* them, in Norris's words, 'to identify (sometimes obsessively) with one partial viewpoint and actively *suppress* all others' (1985: 29). Nonetheless the latent vision of interpretative destiny which a Symbolist ideology conjures up suggests that formalists are not entirely innocent of their fate. The urge to equate single-minded reductionism with naturalised wisdom more often than not prompts them to bring about this conjunction politically rather than critically, through acts of hermeneutic violence. To avoid the same falsehood of aligning itself directly with the interpretative process, 'allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin', a distance which is temporal through and through (de Man 1983: 207). Consequently while Symbolist belief reaches the height of its formalist ambitions in the realisation of the artwork as spatial figure, allegory prolongs its interpretative message in recognition of a continuous and ineluctable temporality. From this viewpoint, music could be said to take its place as the allegorical art *par excellence*; in de

Man's words, it becomes 'the diachronic version of the pattern of non-coincidence within the moment' (de Man 1983: 129). As unremarkable as the *prima facie* case may seem, allegory thereby advances its relationship to music as the one authentic mode of theoretical understanding: that is, it accomplishes the defamiliarisation of the art as temporal process. And in so doing, the same trope necessarily recommends a decisive break with the prevailing formalist orthodoxy. For while the act of interpretation is also inescapably time-bound, any ambition towards a distinct, self-sufficient reading is entirely misplaced. On the contrary, according to the limits of its provisional standing, analytical observation should abandon all belief in interpretative fixity. Instead critical judgement should learn to appreciate the joint virtues of deferment and renewal which constitute that literal 'history of successive re-encounters whose meaning can never be exhausted' (Norris 1988: 52-3).

IX

Since the implications of allegorical thinking seem to strike so deeply into the heartland of the music-analytical project, some preliminary assessment of its claims would perhaps be appropriate. To begin with, the hypostatic, textualising drive of analytical formalism has already been declared; in this respect the linking of word, thought and deed easily confirms de Man's diagnosis of a Symbolist dependency. On a more specific point, the assumption of an equivalence between language and experience has also been noted in the context of Baker's psychological approach. Less immediately apparent, however, is the presupposition of a self-present – if mystified – point of origin behind the critical innovations recommended by Dunsby and Whittall. Nevertheless, the fundamental possibility of formal and linguistic discontinuity would for them seem to depend wholly on the notional (and prior) existence of an ideally unified musical language, if not also a range of accepted masterpieces. Hence the historical rewriting that each proposes fulfils its usual restrictive duty, once again articulating change from the safe confines of an organic temporality.

In spite of its peripheral incisiveness, allegory might still be thought ineffectual against the explanatory force of articulate music theory. After all, the practical gains made by a ramified theoretical base, even taking into account its occasional indiscretions, would appear to be of genuine substance. The reason for this assurance is of course a firm belief in the value of formalist principles. Yet in truth this hermeneutic confidence soon begins to diminish under the pressure of allegorical interrogation. To take the most important point at issue here, the investigative thrust behind formalist analysis at present aspires towards predictive control founded on clarity of reason. In this respect critical instinct is satisfied, as Norris observes, once it 'thinks to have mastered the play of textual figuration and arrived at a stable, self-authenticating sense' (1985: 41). Insofar as no matter of choice is raised, the assumption is uncontroversial.

But as diversity is the necessary prerequisite of this idealised unity, the question must also be asked as to whether such interpretative conflicts as do arise can always be resolved judiciously and without leaving a residue of hermeneutic tension. While readings are not generally considered absolute, the answer here must be negative. And in that event the attempt to produce a fixed interpretation will inevitably be selective. From the allegorical point of view, the kind of impression that this approach leaves on the surface of musical diversity is more akin to that kind of insight which, ‘not knowing truth, nonetheless seeks to write its laws by reducing the numbing heterogeneity of the immediate to a set of apprehensible unities’ (Godzich 1983: xxvii). Pragmatic as its aim may be, formalism is nevertheless dependent on a partial and self-serving form of rationality. On this count the analytical enterprise stands to be convicted for what amounts to deliberate misrecognition, a verdict which bears on ends no less than means. Indeed the latter point is likely to divulge the greatest measure of culpability. For if, within the analytical project, the intention is always the same – to carry through a devotion to the principle of unity as an example of naturalised understanding – the result is also one-dimensional: subjugation of a genuinely temporal art to the service of a spatial aesthetic. Paradoxical and untenable as it may seem, the function of temporality as the ‘originary constitutive category’ is readily exchanged for that of simultaneity ‘which, in truth, is spatial in kind’ (de Man 1983: 207). As a result, the position alters only by degree – effectively where every Symbolist alternative thinks to justify its findings through the putative self-evidence of its own logical base. Correspondingly all self-present schemes of method and evidence, whatever their expression, are likewise condemned as species of conceptual bad faith.

X

Confronted by the demystifying force of allegory, music analysis first betrays its weakness on the level of conceptual orientation. However, while proof of its ideological false-consciousness rests partly on speculative ground, a more direct form of substantiation is evinced in the sphere of analytical demonstration. Because although the symbolic drive of analysis can be seen in its general textualising urge, the most comprehensive kind of assimilation involves the supplementary conceit of an *intrinsic* correspondence between word and object. Consequently the additional goal becomes that of a truly symbolic explanatory mode. Interestingly enough, in the course of their respective arguments Dunsby and Whittall both lay particular store by Schenkerian theory. Only Dunsby makes use of Schenker’s graphic techniques; all the same it is clear that this borrowing is intended to support the more normative aspects of multi-piece prolongation. Nonetheless the real point behind this observation is not to discuss Dunsby’s reliance on Schenker – although that too is relevant – but to emphasise that in general the latter’s ideogrammatic method represents the

epitome of symbolic musical expression. For that matter his explicit belief that 'the graphic representation is part of the composition' (Schenker 1979: xxiii) effectively claims the status of literary synecdoche in being able to render the symbol, in de Man's phrase, as 'a part of the totality that it represents' (1983: 191). In spite of this potential advantage, contemporary opinion – Dunsby included – seems happier to conceive of representational schemes as notational expedients. Notwithstanding the fact, it is still perhaps a matter for debate as to whether even the pictorial aspect of Schenker's symbolic concordance between image and substance is not also a fundamental explanation for its authority.

Committed to developing its own characteristic form of expression, present-day analysis turns instead towards narrative description for its explanatory staple. Within this context graphic notation may still provide an appropriately elegant and concise mode of exposition; nevertheless it remains subservient to the rhetorical influence – and hence the additional textual authority – of fictive telling. The idea of a well-formed narrative sequence is also favoured for its promotion of logical continuity. All the same, while this vehicle necessarily differs from Schenker's pictorial medium, its purpose is identical: to ensure a complete, self-determining union between critical thought, descriptive language and musical reality. For this reason the power of textual argument to ensure (interpretative) thematic coherence merely leads back once again to the concept of an aesthetic founded on linguistic self-presence.

The communicative front put up by music analysis represents a concerted monument to symbolic exposition. And as a result it falls collectively foul of allegorical understanding. To recapitulate, allegory always refers to its own dissociated structure as proof of the distinction between sign and sense; any opportune linking of the two is rejected outright. By this reckoning all forms of inscription are held equally suspect. Thus graphic depiction, for example, is reduced to the same level of arbitrariness as every other signifying system. In fact the limitations of Schenkerian techniques offer a prime example of Symbolist false consciousness on this point. For not only does this method instantiate the cardinal Symbolist error of generalising from part to whole, but it also forgets the fact that musical notation has no inherent relation to its sounding reality. By comparison, allegory actually has less reason to counter prose description; after all, first-order narrative construction necessarily entails a number of pragmatic choices without which discourse would be impossible. Even so, the inveterate tendency of all totalising readings to assemble a narrative which strives after symbolic status inevitably succeeds in alerting the censure of deconstructive criticism. In this case too the Symbolist aim is to complete the realisation of an independent totality. But the point at which explanatory sufficiency is thought to be reached also proves to be that of its undoing. In this respect it is the acceptance of convenient yet premature closure that most obviously contravenes the principles of allegory. However, the more specific failing which lies behind the ideal of a totalising narrative is its thorough disregard for the vagaries and imprecisions inherent in language. Indeed the contrary faith in linguistic self-presence is what makes it doubly self-defeating.

For on the one hand it is the neglect of the gap between figural and referential meaning that first leaves room for the sceptical interrogation of allegorical enquiry. And on the other, the very promiscuity of rhetorical significance means that narrative effectively deconstructs itself even while exercising its own range of expository devices. To reread de Man's comment on theory and text in terms of theoretical narrative alone:

It seems that as soon as a text knows what it states, it can only act deceptively . . . and if a text does not act it cannot state what it knows. The distinction between a text as narrative and a text as theory also belongs to this field of tension. (1979: 270)

On this occasion the allegorical argument is unquestionably more textually orientated. So much so that, when measured against the realities of contemporary analytical practice, its conclusions might appear largely irrelevant. Ordinarily, a theoretical tradition whose narrating voice appears so well-trained could expect to inveigh against the accusation of rhetorical sophistry. Yet within the prevailing methodology, only semiotic study seems genuinely aware of analytical explanation as a narrative construct, and this under the approved, totalising heading of 'plot'. Hence the fact of the matter is that music analysis is implicitly reliant on the idea of narrative integrity: integrity which automatically suppresses those details that oppose its progress towards unified meaning. Nonetheless (and reiterating de Man's assertion) it is the very act of deception through which a text must convey its burden of meaning that finally brings about its downfall. Because while rhetorical discourse is incapable of setting limits on its signifying range, it can only generate an approximate coherence. Put simply, the opportunity of reading narrative against itself may give rise to any number of implications which call its semantic artifices into question. A formalist regime which sets out to transmit a unifying vision is therefore forced into the ironic realisation that its own communicative wholeness is impossible to guarantee. Consequently it too comes in time to represent one further dupe of the lawlessness of the text.

However, for a number of theoretical options which categorically reject all aspiration to narrative supremacy, the emphasis placed on allegory by the current thesis might yet appear ill-judged. Agreed, the potential for demystification is always intriguing, if not also seductive; even so, the present line of argument merely falls foul of its own worthy intentions by mistaking the structural integrity of music for the signifying power of language. Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to go into the background of the objection raised here, the issue is indeed to be taken seriously while music is not in any sense a strict analogy for natural language. Indeed, were the dispute to be settled on the strength of semantic content alone, then the present contention would surely be proved right. But interpreting the objection as bearing specifically on the question of unity, the point of argument seems to derive less from the uncertainty of what constitutes a language than from the possibility of

continuing to perceive music as pure form. As such, the principle of signification holds no special distinction; the matter really boils down once again to one of interpretative wholeness. On this count a difference in kind between music and language still cannot be dismissed as purely academic. The balance between sound and sense will be responsible for different kinds of interpretative enigma in each respect. All the same the one conclusion which does not follow is that any non-linguistic medium will simply be free of internal contradiction. On the contrary, undecidability is altogether characteristic of musical form, a fact made clear by alternative readings of the same repertoire. Moreover, that the analytical project stops short of declaring its findings definitive indicates that it too recognises something of the impasse engendered by structural *aporiae*. To this end the currency of absolute form and other consoling metaphors belongs more to that anachronistic dogma which sustains the idea of an ultimate, integrative ground where all paradox is finally resolved. Nevertheless, for the time being at least, analysis is unlikely to break entirely free of this spirit. Because while it persists in working against rather than within such ambiguities, the lure of synthesis, of totalisation, will always be too strong.

By contrast, allegorical interpretation drives home its message 'by constantly revealing the interpretative slide from moment to moment in the chain of signification' (Norris 1985: 82). And for this reason it offers an indispensable lesson for the music-analytical enterprise. As de Man, commenting on the nature of literariness, observes: 'Whereas we have traditionally been accustomed to reading literature by analogy with the plastic arts and with music, we now have to recognise the necessity of a non-perceptual, linguistic moment in painting and in music . . .' (1982: 10). For a reflection on the essence of literary expression, this conclusion might seem oddly drawn. However, to explain the point a little, the notion of something that is linguistic yet not perceived relates less to the puzzle of meaning than to the abstract, material aspect of artistic communication. In this respect music joins with both the fictive aspect of painting and the narrative mode of literature in conveying its meaning through the 'temporal relationships that exist within a system of allegorical signs' (de Man 1983: 208). Correspondingly it bears out de Man's earlier assertion that music, the pattern of diachronic non-coincidence, is allegorical through and through.

The reference to communicative slippage through time is particularly apposite as a way of reprising the previous question of structural integrity. Because against the continued championship of music as pure form, any prolonged comparison between these three creative media can only confirm a realisation which is destructive of music-analytical assumption. For instance, since it is a spatial art, painting has no intrinsic need of temporal articulation. As the ready interchange of abstract and narrative devices illustrates, pictorial representation moves happily between the worlds of allegory and symbol. The case of literature is more complex; here chronology and structural organisation are deeply enmeshed. Nonetheless, while the rediscovery of its temporal condition adds a crucial dimension to the substance of literary discourse, it does

not altogether transform the terms of its reception. In a medium preoccupied with the impact of rhetoric on logico-grammatical semantics, the effect of temporality is to defamiliarise the issue of fictive depiction – to dislocate the critical association between chronological signification and logical formalism rather than to destroy it. But for an art whose essence is that of temporality, of time made audible, the same discovery may be critically self-alienating. In other words, as pure temporality, the musical ‘object’ is entirely devoid of intrinsic stability, a fact which renders all ideas of symbolic closure incoherent on the basis of matter as well as manner. Consequently, although the analysis of musical unity aims, in the manner of its linguistic counterpart, for a consummate moment of self-possessed meaning, it can never even begin to transcend the limits of its temporal predicament. More than painting and literature, music is bound to the condition of its allegorical confinement. In the shadow of its own history, therefore, music analysis above all has reason to appreciate de Man’s paradoxical insight that ‘form is never anything but a process on the way to its completion’ (1983: 31).

XI

Symbolic interpretation forms the paradigm of contemporary theory. A demonstration of this critical disposition is unmistakable, for example, in the seemingly enlightened enquiries of Dunsby and Whittall discussed above. Each begins by recommending a revision of aesthetic presupposition which is then actively restored by the covert assumptions and deceptive strategies of a narrative unfolding. So it is that Dunsby’s examination starts out sceptically with the intent of questioning the tendency towards unthinking holism. His method of playing upon the apparent twists and inconsistencies of an organicist aesthetic subsequently succeeds in exposing the latter’s dogmatic restrictions. On these findings, Dunsby’s thesis seems truly radical: a subversive attempt to abrogate the laws of critical conformism. Even so, while the multi-piece is intended to fall ‘within the scope of the analysis of unity’ (1983a: 169), it is clear that a more positive exposition of integrative values will eventually be necessary. Consequently the important question to ask is whether Dunsby’s revamped vision of the unifying aesthetic will stand up to his original criticisms any better than the old one.

Dunsby’s case for the multi-piece rests fundamentally on what Hilary Putnam refers to in Hegel’s writing as a ‘limit notion of rationality’ (quoted in Norris 1985: 38): a point of logical certitude which, whether strictly axiomatic or not, cannot be transcended. Although seemingly innocent of these sources, Dunsby’s formulation of the concept – based on the level of integration found in Brahms’s symphonic structures – fulfils exactly the same function. He goes on to suggest that if the composer’s Op. 24 *Handel* Variations can be said to follow an arbitrary design, then ‘we must accept that the work is not amenable to analysis, certainly not in the sense that a Brahms symphony is’ (1983a: 171).

Seen in the light of his earlier criticism of multi-movement form, Dunsby's statement begins to read ambiguously. However, the motivation for such a reversal becomes plain when it is understood that a bending of the notion of symphonic form is essential to allow space for the multi-piece idea to come into being. At the same time, since the value of a multi-piece depends on some presence of unity, bending cannot run to breaking without also causing the aesthetic framework to collapse. Thus Dunsby's negative interrogation of received opinion turns out to be no more subversive than the survival of traditional archetypes will allow.

Having first established this premiss, Dunsby then engages with the task of describing the putative structural cohesion which might be discovered within the multi-piece. To accommodate this idea, his initial scepticism is replaced by a more constructive interpretation of apparent unities, a shift which becomes explicit in his references to Réti's work on multi-movement forms. In this context, Dunsby argues that although Réti's proposals may be questioned, even rejected, it would nevertheless be impossible to conceive of counter-examples which could actively disprove them 'since they hold true only until *positive* analytical results arise – a possibility that can never be discounted' (1983a: 172; my emphasis). Once again, his reasoning is less obviously music-analytical than philosophical: a vote in favour of induction which, whether or not intentionally, bears out another of Putnam's recommendations on knowledge as the positive adjunct of understanding. As with the previous instance, Dunsby's cause here exhibits no direct relation to that of Putnam. But what his argument undoubtedly begins to figure forth from this point is a positive attitude towards verification in the face of out and out scepticism. Turning away from negative belief, therefore, he now chooses to hold out for a coherent picture of theory which 'is safe to rely upon for practical purposes' (Putnam 1981: 62).

Throughout the course of this transition, Dunsby is careful to test his case against the work of other commentators. Nonetheless, it is possible to detect more than a hint of positivist doctrine behind this otherwise open-handed consultation. With regard to Réti, for example, Dunsby concludes that 'by demonstrating a unity in Op. 79, he effectively silenced those who may not have suspected it: one simply believes his analysis or not' (1983a: 172). As far as it goes, this assertion seems justifiable; in truth the matter could in all probability be strengthened by taking into account hypotheses such as Chomiński's on Chopin's Preludes and Cooke's on Beethoven's late quartets. However, the fact that each of these solutions supports the Putnam-Dunsby faith in knowledge as something which 'does real work in our lives' is not itself sufficient to alter their relative status (Putnam 1981: 62). Pragmatic and convincing as they may be, none holds the power of absolute authority. In consequence one might expect Dunsby to declare Réti's reading as one interpretation among many. Yet, on the contrary, his rhetorical question as to how a counter-analysis could 'hope to show that the diversity in Op. 79 is somehow more significant than the unity he [Réti] describes' (1983a: 172) signifies a scant concern for possible alternatives. Instead univocality comes to represent the positivist undertow of the search for

a ramified theory through the bluff acceptance of Réti's model.

That the credibility of the multi-piece would eventually hang on this kind of integrative pattern has been commented on above. What remained to be seen was how Dunsby might set about reconciling it with his earlier pronouncements against the logic of musical unity. On this count, the key factor would appear to be the sense of contradiction which he originally sought to emphasise. To take advantage of Réti's thesis, however, Dunsby ignores all mention of such ambiguity; for him, Brahms's Op. 79 is exactly what Réti makes of it. The practical gain behind this move is a mould for the multi-piece – crude, but showing room for development. Evidently Dunsby's aim is then to improve on this template; nevertheless the fate of its product is already sealed as an additional metaphor for organic – and thus symbolic – construction by his newly implemented purge of alternative possibility. Within the further course of his narrative, therefore, Dunsby's references to the incongruities of structural unity carry little force. For that matter the role of multi-movement cycle as limit concept is actually consolidated by the addition of a second guiding principle: commitment to Schenkerian analysis as the validating conception of an integrated tonality.

It is to amplify these principles that Dunsby introduces a notable piece of explanatory strategy into his narrative. Having begun to look for similarities within the Op. 116 Fantasies, he makes the comment that 'one should be cautious in exposing consistent and continuous elements in a multi-piece, since from one point of view it is precisely lack of contrast which ought to characterize collections rather than multi-pieces' (1983a: 179-80). Here the point of verification is not so much that of potential irresolution as the image of the multi-piece as something which exemplifies both 'the tension between contrast and unity that marks . . . long-term logic' and 'the interaction of levels [as] . . . a sign of musical richness and coherence' (1983a: 180). On this occasion, therefore, two ideas operate in tandem: first, the notion that replication of form and even affect signifies the homogeneity common to a collection; second, the understanding that contrast between unity and diversity can be deployed on a number of levels and yet still be resolved at a higher ground of unified perception. It is true that Dunsby elaborates the first of these concepts with respect to gestural continuity. It is also true that neither his description nor his illustration of structure is authentically Schenkerian. All the same, the quixotic generalisation which leads from articulative function to hierarchical structure still discloses a tendentious form of continuity. In consequence the abiding impression conjured up by his argument is that of a leap of imaginative faith demanded by the combination of aesthetic predilection and narrative formation, an alliance which continues to work towards a normative role for the multi-piece.

Moving from the general to the specific, it is now less surprising that Dunsby's analysis should overlook the disruptive implications thrown up by an appeal to overarching synthesis in preference for the teleology of an ever more binding unity. Thus 'no discontinuity is suspected' if the fourth piece of

Brahms's Op. 116 is understood 'as the elaboration of an implication in No. 1, fulfilled only later' (1983a: 178). Similarly, while care must subsequently be taken to avoid 'misrepresenting the patent articulations of one piece ending and another beginning', this need not hamper the assembly of a large-scale tonal form (1983a: 185). In addition, standard aesthetic expectations are satisfied by the postulate of a gestural model based on first-movement sonata form inasmuch as it capitalises on a scheme shared by multi-movement pieces. So that finally Op. 116 can be declared 'as much a multi-piece (rather than a collection) as one could hope to find in the nineteenth century' (1983a: 187).

A paraphrase of this kind admittedly gives only the barest indication of Dunsby's suasive construction. Notwithstanding the fact, it is the awkward problems which are left unsolved by his narrative that bear witness to critical blindness. To be more precise, Dunsby's view of the multi-piece subscribes to the conventional belief that all evidence of contradiction 'must somehow form a larger unity if the final effect is to be satisfying' (Empson, quoted in de Man 1983: 237). In so doing, it eventually chooses to skirt the obstacle of undecidability and instead falls in with the positivist tactic of adopting existing resolutions as a surrogate truth. Try as it might, however, this approach is incapable of grounding its convictions. Because having drawn out the contradictions and inconsistencies of the frame it now wishes to adapt, the corresponding argument merely falls victim to its own unsettling effect. Already committed to the heightening of equivocality, Dunsby's unitarian vision therefore transforms itself into a dissipated criticism of ambiguity – in sum an 'ironic reflection on the absence of the unity it had postulated' (de Man 1983: 28). A few questions will help to illustrate this. Essentially Dunsby's thesis of unity within the multi-piece stems from his conjecture that if pieces 'appear not to be complete, we may justifiably look for their completion . . . later in the collection' (1983a: 176). From the very beginning, this outlook encourages a notion of continuity that is all but seamless. In fact, advance one stage further – in the way that Dunsby advocates – by abolishing the distinction between first-movement form, multi-movement structures and extended one-movement works, and the resulting homogeneity seems unassailable. But does this altogether satisfy the conditions of the multi-piece as he envisages it? For instance, how is one then to avoid misrepresenting the articulation of individual pieces? What are the breaks between pieces for? According to Ingarden, these enter 'into the totality of the work' with the object of revealing 'the relationship between the movements' (1986: 135). If so, Op. 116 becomes a multi-movement work differentiated only by scale. If not, then it must represent a one-movement structure *dissecta membra*. Either way, having been confronted with such temporal displacement, is it still correct to expect no sense of discontinuity? Indeed is it possible, other than by underscoring the open-form aspect of multi-movement organisation, to accept passively the delayed fulfilment of earlier implication, a modernist technique which would not be thought unduly atavistic for either Berg or Carter, let alone Brahms? And incidentally, since one is asked to accept much of what is said in the name of tonal prolongation, how

much trouble might we have expected Brahms to have taken with the key-patterning of movements within the First Symphony?

In sum it is lacunae of this kind that Dunsby's case appears powerless to bridge. Nor, in its present state, is his argument likely to proceed much further. For the fact of the matter is that, having successfully exposed the tensions which run through a Symbolist ideology, it is not then possible, other than by patent *volte face*, to grant that ideology critical immunity. On the contrary, what should, but does not, complicate matters in Dunsby's case is some recognition that the pluralist implications of his interpretation are given to deny one another; however attractive the prospect, they 'cannot simply be conceived to coexist in a peaceful state of aesthetic suspension' (Norris 1985: 75). On this particular issue Whittall's account of theoretical tensions and discontinuities could be anticipated as exhibiting a keener instinct. And in fact this expectation is borne out by his eagerness to regard atonality as a language different in both degree and kind from tonality. From the beginning, Whittall's analysis of Webern's Op. 7, No. 3 is set about with correctives to the organicist enthusiasm for showing 'how one thing leads to another' (Webern, quoted in Whittall 1983: 733). Nonetheless, the first indication that more familiar aesthetic preconceptions might be active is conveyed as early as Whittall's adoption of the symbiotic analogy to describe the phenomenon of compositional plurality. Even without attempting to overload the metaphor, its naturalising connotation – in favour of organic dependency rather than abstract opposition – is unmistakable. Moreover the impression of organicist commitment is in no sense diminished by Whittall's comment that 'analysis involves interpretation in terms of fundamental forces which persist from work to work: hence the power of the Schenkerian concept of tonality, in which substructure is the purest kind of structure' (1983: 735). For the sake of exploiting the antinomies which lie within a totalising interpretation, one might perhaps foresee Whittall's intention as seeking to turn this type of assertion back on itself. Yet far from questioning the value of predictive power, his thesis unfolds as a further tribute to the icon of articulate theory. Thus rather than subjecting the synthesising tendencies of Schenkerian voice leading to deliberate censure, Whittall actually proceeds to enshrine the method as a limit notion.

Like Dunsby, then, Whittall too leans heavily on Schenkerian theory as one of the grounding principles of analytical rationality. To this end, he is less obviously indebted to Schenker's graphic technique; analytical illustration of complementary features is accomplished by a combination of prose and integer notation. All the same, while Dunsby's use of pictorial diagram gives an extra depth to his symbolic representation, it is Whittall's argument that suffers most from the presence of inconsistencies within the Schenkerian model. For instance, following the train of their respective thoughts, it is apparent that the analysis cited by Dunsby of Brahms's Op. 24 *Handel* Variations creates a temporary loophole around variation form which he is happy to exploit. For Whittall, on the other hand, consistency is of the essence: in his terms, the kind of Schenkerian description that sees a B♭ *Urfinie* in G minor as 'an attractive,

secret contradiction on account of its ancestry in a B flat major scale' would represent an anomaly that is not so much helpful as damaging (Schenker, quoted in Dunsby 1983a: 170). The point is that the value of a limit notion depends wholly on the fact that it cannot be transcended. And of course the same condition necessarily entails the corollary of the limit concept itself being internally consistent. By contrast, Schenkerian theory, at least on this evidence, seems to falter over the question of paradox. Consequently any argument which might depend on its constancy is likely to reflect the same uncertainty.

One form of countering move to make in this context (besides that of invoking the standard, knock-down argument of 'the exception that proves the rule') would be to dismiss all such aberrations as examples of theoretical prototype; after all, a period of some ten years separates this article from the efforts of *Free Composition* and the *Five Graphic Music Analyses*. Nevertheless the doubt that still prevails is whether or not these later testaments to a truly integrated tonality are, in actual fact, any more definitive than Schenker's earlier efforts. In this respect the lack of a final, authenticating ground is decisive; without it no one reading can be considered axiomatic – or, as expressed in the analytical vernacular, 'the fact that the same *Ursatz* form can be dispositioned in several different ways in the same piece, yielding quite different prolongational derivations . . . suggests that several analytical interpretations may be *equally* valid' (Narmour 1977: 22). For his part, Whittall does not refer to this relativist perspective; at the same time he avoids lending any dogmatic support to Schenker's analyses, preferring instead to concentrate on the general harmonic implications of his theory. Even so, while Whittall is circumspect about the specific application of Schenker's system, he willingly espouses the latter's view of tonality as a complete, self-determining hierarchy. As a result no allowance is made for the possibility of intractable resistance; rather, wholesale tonal synthesis is depicted as the stable edifice that modernist discontinuity chose to react against. Altogether the Schenkerian notion of a unified musical language attains an ideal status for Whittall. And on this count his policy of ignoring all contrary evidence appears thoroughly doctrinaire. Furthermore it is not surprising that this bias should exert a significant effect on his attempts at narrative explanation. Indeed the fact is that, in their active deception, these are made to unfold less as an exploration of modernist innovation than as the defence and eventual extension of a traditional, Symbolist aesthetic.

A particularly distinctive gesture in this direction is evinced by Whittall's occasional allusions to unmediated perception in order to verify his reading of Webern's Op. 7, No. 3. Taken at face value, these references might seem unexceptionable – an instance of speculative enquiry finding justification for its conclusions in the realities of sound. However, Whittall's positioning of his observations as closer to untrammelled insight than to theoretical guarantee is itself made more contentious by the lack of an accompanying explanation. For although, as before, its implications are left unspoken, this principle too reverberates in a strongly philosophical fashion – this time against the givenness of experience as the foundation of understanding. The epistemological

argument that arises from the identification of perception with privileged access denounces any conception of experience as something either pure or uniquely referential. Thus, on the one hand, faith in independent sense impressions ends in solipsism, while, on the other, the matching of experience with expression cannot satisfy the totality of causal conditions which impinge upon language as a communicative agent. In each case it is difficult to surmise the prospective gains that Whittall expects to make by switching from one form of theoretical vocabulary to a purportedly intuitive aural reaction. Even if the aim is not to give an account of raw sense data, the likelihood of establishing a more authentic discourse through experience is equally remote. Neither, ironically enough, can it be said that audibility occupies any special place within the context of Webern's music; for that matter, his remark that even in tonality 'unity was mostly felt only unconsciously' indicates an unusually passive attitude on the part of a composer towards the subject of aural comprehensibility (1963: 53).

To determine the darker purpose of Whittall's perceptual asides in this instance, it is first necessary to realise that these are meant only to refer to the presence of pitch, and more precisely tonal focus. All mention of first-hand experience is therefore made in support of tonal grammar and syntax; consequently the narrative effectively short-circuits at such moments to evade the issue of how far atonal function may be heard. At first sight, it might seem incongruous to discount the capacity of any analytical method to answer this query. But the underlying motivation becomes clear once related to Whittall's limit notion of a fully integrated Schenkerian tonality: that in essence, Schenkerian theory will retain its primacy while it is thought to be capable of resolving surface antinomies at a higher level of perception. As Whittall notes, other 'background' methods, including Fortean set theory, may present a convincing description of atonal connectedness. Yet their inability to assign precise functions – both technical and audible – to this description provides a faithful index of the distinction between a traditionalist and a modernist aesthetic. Already committed to a preservation of symbolic unity, Whittall therefore sets out to break past and present over the point of perceptual reality. And in this regard his appropriation of experience is entirely consistent with that species of phenomenalist reduction which forms the basis of Kantian aesthetic judgement. That the potential for sensory realisation of any musical language should appear to hinge on arbitrary selection ought not to seem remarkable, however. Because as Dahlhaus concludes, there is no undogmatic theory of art which is likely to admit 'that the criterion of audibility . . . is not a natural law of aesthetics but a postulate of historically limited scope' (1983: 54). Rather it is the prospect of using sensory immediacy to ideological ends that gives a traditionalist aesthetic its force. Hence Whittall's elusive tactics follow an altogether well-defined route in laying down the limits of aesthetic orthodoxy. According to his definition, modernism is that which falls *outside* the boundaries of logically governed, perceptually validated creativity. Nonetheless identification of aesthetic division raises the question of when and how it should be marked, an issue which takes Whittall's thesis into the sphere of historical

reflection.

Concerned with the diachronic application of Symbolist criteria, Whittall first advises that theorists should aim less for a position of ideal, objective omniscience than for 'the kind of insight into the past that enables them to sense what aspects of the old music in question are of central theoretical concern' (1987: 4). And once again it is Schenker's vision which should make it impossible for us to assume that 'music so different from that in which [he] . . . found the richest and most satisfying integration of structural levels has unity of a remotely comparable kind' (1987: 8). According to Whittall, it is only by contrast with the 'highly integrated view of tonality' which Schenker proposes that atonality is assured of the capacity 'to exploit a tension that reaches beyond style into the structural substances of the music itself' (1987: 8; 14-15). As a result theorists must be prepared to accept that 'the juxtaposition and superimposition of different elements may be a more natural and necessary way of appreciating and describing the content of [non-tonal] . . . compositions than unity or synthesis' (1987: 15). The idea of complementary relations will only suggest incoherence and inferiority 'if we invariably strive to demonstrate that such connections and continuities as there are provide the music's most vital substance, its sole sense-making components' (1987: 15).

From the conformist point of view, Whittall's thesis might still seem radical in making a purposive attempt to categorise creative departures long since intuited, yet seldom specified. Read for its Symbolist predispositions, however, his narrative gives no such impression of revolutionary zeal; instead the sense is of critical innovation being successively admitted and denied in the name of a historicist *telos*. So it is that he is able to dramatise the ambiguities underlying Berg's Violin Concerto in one instance while condemning Boulez and Schenker for their refusal to adopt a 'more comprehensive sense of history' in another (1987: 14). Under Whittall's guidance the search for modernist antecedents follows a similar pattern, drawing in Berlioz and, more importantly, Wagner as representatives of 'that anti-organic strain of Romanticism' within nineteenth-century music (1987: 19). Yet the admission of these and other cases in the interests of continuity is not without impact on the terms of his limit notion; indeed the concept begins to take on an air of unreality while it is manoeuvred further and further back 'into a mythical past' of organic integrity (Norris 1988: 40). In the event, Whittall avoids trying to settle the issue of modernist origins, a solution which effectively immobilises any tangible prospect of historical development. All the same this tactic too is essential to the production of his grand strategy: a teleological approach to paradigm change such that at any given point 'the aesthetic order may undergo a shift which changes the aspect of all that has preceded it' (Scruton, quoted in Norris 1985: 137).

On Whittall's recommendation it would be reasonable to believe that the role of philosopher-guardian monitoring this process could be taken by the theorists to whom he refers. But the true architects of critical progress in these terms are surely the historically-conscious aestheticians mindful of the shortcomings that plague certain theoretical schemes. And far from advocating change, the

purpose of their legislation is always to honour the value of traditional canons. For example, in Whittall's own case, it is difficult to sense anything other than a diversity-in-relation-to-unity principle behind the belief that contrast may be more significantly deployed in a twelve-note context, particularly when this is seen as 'part of Webern's . . . essential . . . classicism' (1987: 7). On the contrary, if disjunction were to be taken seriously, then the demonstration of prolonged backgrounds would still be likely to leave enough logical – that is, theoretical – tension between what can be called 'old' and 'new' to subvert any form of painless transformation. Similarly it is otherwise far from clear which synthesising light reveals that the 'essence of Stravinsky's neo-classicism' is its capacity to reconcile the conflict between otherwise complementary diversities (1987: 6). For as Whittall himself points out, theory, left unchecked, does not of necessity look 'for an integrated interpretation of its subject-matter' (1987: 5). Properly speaking it is the ideological power of aesthetic harmonisation, itself grounded in the cult of the Symbol, that initially demands yet ultimately suppresses the kind of outright freedom which might otherwise cause it to examine its own premisses. Thus while Whittall may begin with the intention of liberating the notion of contemporaneity from its conventionalist shackles, it seems that he cannot help but succumb to the imprisonment of organic temporality for the sake of an unreflecting Symbolist ideal.

What Whittall, like Dunsby before him, relinquishes in his progress towards symbolic understanding is the awareness that interpretation can never hope to contain the manifold implications of structural undecidability. As with Dunsby, he bears an instinctive understanding of the inconsistencies which lurk beneath the formalist orthodoxy – hence theory is at first treated negatively as a way of opposing received opinion over the matters of form and structure. (Indeed he is currently the *only* major analyst confronting the issue of undecidability. [See below, pp.171-5 of Whittall's Review Survey! Ed.]) Nevertheless he is soon led, by the apparent imperative of presenting 'a well conducted sequence of critical argument', to try to resolve the resultant ambiguities within a "logical" account of how perceptions, reasons and evaluative judgements hang together' (Norris 1985: 125). Primarily a saving device, this state of suspension is brought about, by both Whittall and Dunsby, through a further insistence on context as an ordering principle. Thus for Dunsby the governing confine is that 'of the work as a whole, conceived as exerting a pressure to conform on its various constituent meanings', whereas for Whittall the appeal is to 'the larger historical context' which bears witness as a method of 'keeping the plurality of sense within tolerable limits' (Norris 1985: 169). On each occasion context is taken up as a way of ensuring the efficacy of legitimating reason – in short, as a boundary within which the Symbolist moment of self-possessed meaning may be sought. However, the significance of this proposition is not so much contained in its restrictive function as the understanding that its motivation is aesthetic and not theoretical. Caught up in the sway of aesthetic predisposition, therefore, Whittall and Dunsby each conclude by approving that which they originally sought to denounce.

Consequently Symbolist beliefs are willed to triumph once again in the face of enlightened adversity.

XII

In keeping with its allegorical message, the present discourse cannot hope to avail itself of a conclusion. Instead, to recapitulate, the interpretative code it has sought to uncover and criticise is that 'essentialist, anti-historical, formalist and organicist' species which continues to dominate the current theoretical enterprise (Eagleton 1983: 60). Correspondingly, the argument has ranged over the understanding of unity as familiar concept, historical idea and pillar of both music theory and praxis. In each instance the customary intention is the same: to try to close the unwished-for gap between subject and object, word and thing. And to ensure a snug conjugacy, various enabling assumptions from spatio-temporal conversion to privileged representation are granted unrestricted licence. The agency which purportedly holds this scheme in place is that of narrative design. But on reflection, it is the very inability of fictive construction to police its own rhetorical mode that most readily calls the prevailing ideology into question. Indeed, narrative failure of this kind is altogether emblematic of the dogmatic spirit which initially drives, and yet finally overtakes, all explanatory systems in the absence of an absolute truth. By comparison the power of allegory lies in its resistance to such partiality. Yet in spite of its aspiration to a higher stage of dialectical awareness, allegorical consciousness does not fulfil the role of self-present panacea. Like every other form of descriptive explanation, allegory itself is enlightened only in accordance with its own measure of self-awareness. For this reason, its recommendations are never offered as anything more than provisional.

A terse, rigid abstract of this kind does not offer much cause for positive identification. But then its aim is not to find room for consoling myth, however superior. On the contrary, the tenor of the present argument should be clear: that a sceptical inquiry has the very real function 'of raising new problems by undermining easy solutions' (Piaget 1971: 129). Consequently it fully accepts that, under such conditions, the only acceptable standpoint is a 'radically constructivist [one] . . . which reduces all knowledge to a species of fictional projection' (Norris 1985: 109). If any cause for optimism can be perceived in these reduced circumstances, it comes not through a fulfilment of, but rather through a release from, the Sisyphean task of perfecting naturalistic terms for the hermeneutic act which will not subsequently be dismissed as doctrinaire fallacies. Even so, the current sceptical alternative does not propose a tricking espousal of idealism. The resistance that it encounters in determining its observations guarantees that the subject matter 'is not, as it were, a matter of the subject; it is "out there" and not "in here"' (Shelley 1988: 43). By redrawing its distance from the world of empirical reality, allegorical consciousness simply prepares to discover itself at an unbridgeable remove from that world. Self-

willed mystification apart, there is no way in which it can expect to re-establish 'unmediated touch' with those works of art 'whose antics [otherwise] make our . . . opinions true or false' (Davidson 1974: 20).

Or is there? In appropriating this quotation from Donald Davidson, the current exposition cuts squarely against the grain of his thesis that ostensive pragmatism is the only viable solution to the unavailability of a hard-and-fast realist alternative. For most music theorists, the opportunity to treat observation languages and even unifying interpretations, with Davidson, as part of the down-to-earth apparatus which helps us to 'do what we want to do' would no doubt go a long way towards redeeming the contemporary situation (Rorty 1980: 10). In fact his assertion of a holistic view of language implies a sympathy with the needs of latter-day theory which it would seem altogether unwise not to acknowledge. Insofar as it would be likely to go, the alliance might well prove fruitful. But even so, the decision to pursue a pragmatist course should not be thought to provide an escape from sceptical interrogation. Any attempt to reduce the space between word and world will eventually invite ideological censure; and on this count even an ostensive linking of the two such as Davidson proposes suggests a distinct shift in favour of unresisting passivity. To clarify this matter a little, it is not that allegorical understanding must always insist on pursuing meaning to its destruction. After all, 'there is no theory of interpretation so resolutely antinomian that it asks for its own arguments to be systematically misread' (Norris 1985: 175). But in perpetuating its own logical impedance, its own obduracy to the equation of perception with reality, allegorical understanding seeks to avoid too ready an answer to the problems of criticism. Consequently even a modest proposition of the kind Davidson makes will still be open to question.

However, bringing the argument around to this position inevitably raises the issue of its philosophical standing. Here there is no need to search for a case to answer. Because from the philosopher's viewpoint the objections to radical scepticism are already well known: that, without some kind of firm (and therefore contradictory) attachment, negative belief must remain incarcerated in an impenetrable solipsism. Hence those sceptics who think to have escaped their self-imposed fates as prisoners of consciousness do so only at the expense of becoming dogmatic libertarians. By established criteria, scepticism seems eminently self-defeating. Nevertheless, there is, as Michael Frede has recently observed (1984), a tendency within this counter-argument to assume that scepticism must always amount to a defence of the belief that nothing can be known. The assumption itself is not of recent origin; the earliest Greek sceptics were themselves denounced on similar grounds. But familiarity apart, Frede suggests, there is good cause to suppose that this line of opposition takes traditional canons of reasoning too much into account. Referring specifically to the Classical sceptics, he concludes that, far from taking a particular stand, they were not concerned 'to establish or to defend any position, let alone the position that nothing is, or can be, known' (1984: 255). As it was, they simply knew the possible objections too well: 'limited experience, experience with the wrong

claims, experience with the wrong opponents, one day we will know, etc.’ (1984: 266). At the same time, this knowledge was something they were left with rather than something that they sought to demonstrate. In all they had no stake in the matter. Therefore such assent as the Classical sceptics were willing to give to the impossibility of knowledge actually amounted to no more than an agreement that judgement should be suspended in the light of our inability to set and attain fixed and binding standards.

It would be highly misrepresentative to claim that allegorical understanding in any way attempts to re-establish the same position on either a conceptual or a historical plane. The obstacle it places before all species of naturalised wisdom bespeaks an opposition which is neither wholly disinterested nor the outcome of ratiocinative abstraction. Nonetheless possible comparisons do not completely evaporate with this admission. For in stipulating its own provisionality, allegorical understanding likewise eschews any kind of doctrinal insistence. And more significantly still, the very notion of undecidability which prompts this response is itself part of a fundamental reaction against the Classical imperative of *hairesis*, of deliberate choice. Granted, these principles do not by themselves add up to a watertight philosophical declaration; for that matter the instinct for practical application ensures that critical theory can never expect to satisfy its needs according to philosophical criteria alone. However, what they do show is that accepted canons of rationality are neither abused nor abandoned in the quest for truth. If allegorical understanding can legitimately be said to sustain a belief in emancipation, it is careful to do so without falling under the spell of a wholly negative metaphysics.

In actuality it is perhaps this latter juxtaposition of optimistic affirmation with sceptical mistrust that comes closest to capturing the spirit of allegorical enquiry. Because like the Marxist aesthetic to which it is related, allegory embodies a tension between, on the one hand, ‘a positive or “utopian” impulse’ which sustains an image of critical plenitude and, on the other, ‘a “negative hermeneutic” which deconstructs [all] . . . forms of ideological mystification’ (Norris 1983: 118). In sum, allegory is the product of an inherent duality. And while its dialectical process is potentially unending, it remains inimical to all thought of paradigmatic reification. Indeed the reason why the present discourse has so far skirted the matter of analytical aptitude is that standard expectations are rendered almost meaningless in such circumstances. In this light it may appear easier to refer to allegory by what it is not – hence the denial of Symbolist values. All the same its central aim is clear: to respect ‘the paradoxical limits of all interpretation’ (Norris 1983: 125). Furthermore its mode of communication, rather than aspiring to that impression of continuity it knows to be illusory, can in turn be anticipated as something disjunctive, even fragmentary, in character. For inasmuch as its purpose is to *name* that conflict which cannot be resolved, allegorical argument constantly remakes the chains of logical and narrative succession. By taking this course allegory also dissolves the last vestige of articulate theory: adherence to a distinct system. Whatever the individual case, it designates no preferred method or approach. In spite of this,

allegory does not simply give up all hope of constructive insight. On the contrary, it is to keep alive the prospect of disinterested truth that allegorical understanding deliberately resists the use of convenient conceptual props.

The same is, I hope, true of the present discourse; even so, it would be incongruous to announce that this narrative does not display its own set of authorising conventions. As Caplan has remarked, we must 'be blind to our own frames', especially when these involve the necessity of stating referential fallacies in a referential mode (1986: 82). Even within the current field of vision, the impression of self-appointed objectivity is most likely responsible for several unwanted shades of opacity. That there is strength, not to say force, to be gained from this standpoint is, nonetheless, undeniable. Because by maintaining its obstinacy to received opinion, allegorical understanding succeeds in thwarting the most powerful threat to sceptical reaction – that of institutionalisation. In this regard allegory chooses to resist commensurability with established values. Yet to return to the specific context of the analytical project, its aim is not merely to abandon all theoretical aspiration. Instead the model it proposes in the absence of closure, unity and other treasured ideals is one both of 'theory and not theory at the same time, the universal theory of the impossibility of theory' (de Man 1982: 20, which is the source for all further references). To this end allegory is fully comprehending of the need for theoretical reflection. However, it also recognises that speculation is not only enabled, but also disabled, by the insurmountable resistance which it encounters. As a result, its own idea of theory is uncompromising: that 'nothing can overcome the resistance to theory, since theory is itself this resistance'. The conclusion is not without its impact on the goal of prediction. For with respect to traditional expectations 'the loftier the aims and the better the methods of . . . theory, the less possible it becomes'. Notwithstanding the fact, theory will not dwindle under the command of allegory. Rather it 'cannot help but flourish', and the more it is resisted, 'the more it flourishes', since, like allegory, 'the language it speaks is the language of self-resistance'. In reviewing the concept of musical unity, I have attempted to show the value of such resistance for the music-analytical enterprise. What remains impossible to decide is whether, in the event, it will help to bring about a triumph or a fall.

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