

Of Canons & Context: Toward a Historiography of Twentieth-Century Music¹

Christopher A. Williams

What good is freedom of thought if it amounts to nothing more than a freedom to refuse to understand?

– Rose Rosengard Subotnik²

Theories of history, continuously evolving as fresh scholarship reshapes our perception of things past, take root in the teaching of history. Too often, though, the agendas behind this teaching go unquestioned. In the field of music scholarship, long-standing acceptance of the autocratic views of the performance, composition, and scholarly establishments has instilled a widespread and unquestioned faith in a received canon of genius, especially with regard to music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The tenacious narrowness of this canon

1. This essay is dedicated to Greg Salmon, whom I knew from 1980, when we met in an undergraduate composition class, until his death in an auto accident in 1991. When he was not sharing his latest complaints about the Mets, anecdotes about Russia, or trading recordings, we would talk for hours about the ways in which views of history are filtered through cultural bias. Much of this article was directly inspired by those conversations.

2. *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology* (Minneapolis, 1991), 11.

has been remarkable, persisting despite several waves of recent criticism. But while certain scholars have begun lately to probe the ideological basis of this narrowness (albeit far more timidly than their colleagues in the other humanities), even the fresh critical voices that have established themselves in the profession have seemed reluctant to question or amend the basic collection of pieces conventionally considered worthy of study. In the matter of twentieth-century music, resistance to examining how we arrive at this collection has been further compounded by the continuing dominance of a historical model that privileges precompositional method over compositional result, technical progress over stylistic evolution, absolute music over dramatic or multimedia works, and pitch structure over other dimensions of musical texture.

The present essay takes as its point of departure the most recent general history of our century's concert music, Robert P. Morgan's *Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: Norton, 1991). The author's strong emphasis on cultural and historical context in the preface and chapter introductions, acknowledgment of multicultural and even gender-related issues, and uncommonly nuanced treatment of selected iconoclastic figures seem to suggest that his book is intended not just as an undergraduate or graduate survey textbook, but as a serious historiographical work, one which reassesses the present century in view of the changing compositional priorities and the larger issues of cultural environment that have long been neglected in textbooks which teach the history of music. Consequently, Morgan's book invites comparison with the analogous volumes of the *Storia della Musica* series or the *Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft*. The Norton volume also demands close scrutiny since it likely will join the companion volumes by Richard Hoppin and Leon Plantinga in becoming a standard university textbook in its field. Indeed, in his review for *Notes*, composer John Thow argues that, of all available histories of twentieth-century music, Morgan's seems most clearly destined to fulfill the needs of the widest variety of readers and students:

It is clearly written, concise, accurate, and...includes...a degree of cultural and historical documentation unequaled in previous general surveys of twentieth-century music.³

Unfortunately, Morgan's book also retains many of the patterns and problems typical of American approaches to twentieth-century music. Despite his announced engagement with the changing historical contexts of music, he nevertheless validates the familiar prejudices of avant-garde aesthetics which favor technical sophistication, prejudices which also undermine the value of raising cultural and historical issues in the first place. The styles of commonly acknowledged leaders of the avant-garde—Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Bartók, Boulez—are parsed, defined, and distinguished, while those of other figures are lumped together in an undifferentiated mass. The reader comes away with little sense of how a Shostakovich might differ from a Pfitzner, or a Reger from a Britten; all four simply are labeled "conservative," a word used throughout the book as a synonym for "regressive." In this way, Morgan relies on rhetoric to dismiss what a historical, institutional, or cultural perspective on this century's music cannot afford to overlook: a panoply of styles, many of which determinedly resist or are unrelated to the established narrative of twentieth-century music, but which have equal claims to artistic seriousness.

Morgan's preface makes clear that he accepts the assumptions of such postwar neomodernists as Boulez and Babbitt, since he both alleges a decline of individual style (in favor of depersonalized "techniques") after 1950, and claims this transformation as an untroubling product of historical necessity (p. xv). Of more concern, though, is his longing for a new compositional orthodoxy to replace the pursuit of total serialism and electronic music that, until recently, stereotyped the idea of "new music":

3. *Notes* 49, no. 1 (1992): 122-23.

Conceivably, of course, we may eventually come to recognize a *principal line of musical evolution* encompassing current music.... If... in the not-too-distant future there should coalesce a new “*common practice*,” with basic technical and stylistic assumptions shared by a majority of composers, today’s overriding pluralism, its seemingly contradictory and disparate tendencies, might come to be understood as *directed toward a new, as yet unimagined, musical era*. (p. xvi; emphasis mine)

This longing for a “brave new world” of stylistic homogeneity—and the implicit desire to use it as a prescriptive value criterion—echoes the language of recent strands of neo-Schenkerian and atonal music theory, in which proof of a unified set of principles is accorded higher value than the illumination of artistic subtleties in individual works. Using the full force of vituperation, some of these theorists have attempted to stave off the intrusion of style, context, and idiosyncrasy into analysis, arguing, in the narrow terms available to their own theoretical discourse, that such elements are mere “foreground” illusions, invested with importance only by those who would compromise the essential purity and autonomy of great music.⁴ Morgan’s historiography, though hardly so polemical, follows a similar path toward a comfortable model of history unsullied by contradictions, iconoclastic eddies, or the mere contingency of aesthetic politics. Elegance, rather than accuracy, seems to be the goal.

And yet, in an article for *Critical Inquiry* written in 1984, Morgan himself repudiated the idea that a common practice could be usefully applied to twentieth-century music. In contemporary music, “unlike in earlier Western music, one is unable to find the...universal acceptance of an enduring set of formal conventions evident throughout a given linguistic domain.”⁵ Criticizing Donald Mitchell’s attempt “to define a twen-

4. A case in point is Matthew Brown and Douglas J. Dempster, “The Scientific Image of Music Theory,” *Journal of Music Theory* 33, no. 1 (1989): 65-106.

5. Robert P. Morgan, “Secret Languages: The Roots of Musical Modernism,” *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1984): 443.

tieth-century musical mainstream" on the basis of Schoenberg's twelve-tone music (p. 443), he chronicles how the desire to find alternatives to an overworked vocabulary of tonal music led several composers at the turn of the century to forge alternative languages. Morgan portrays this so-called "linguistic" crisis as a logical outgrowth of the nineteenth-century idea of absolute music. Even as certain literati (including Nietzsche, Hoffmannsthal, Verlaine, and Walter Pater) idealized absolute music as an unmediated form of language, musicians, for their part, recognized that instrumental music could achieve linguistic coherence only at the price of an elaborate and ultimately stifling system of structural conventions. "Not by chance," he adds, "this system began to be theoretically codified at just the time instrumental music began to break away from its vocal-linguistic heritage" (p. 447).

Working within this system, the article continues, composers seeking ever new means of expression were forced to challenge its limitations. Wagner, for instance, expanded his harmonic vocabulary by saturating an essentially triadic structure with chromaticism, but in so doing greatly weakened the power of that triadic structure. At the turn of the century, composers began to find a way to overcome the structural limitations of tonality in a radical "transformation in the relationship between compositional foreground and compositional background—that is, between the musical surface and its formal substructure" (p. 451).

This foregrounding of musical structure, while used by composers like Reger to expand expressive possibilities within the tonal system, also enabled many of the initial posttonal experiments. In his 1984 article, Morgan examines two of these experiments at length: Scriabin's use of foreground dissonance within a tonal framework, and Schoenberg's gradual move from free atonality to a new codification in the form of the twelve-tone system. While the opinion that Scriabin's prioritization of dominant sonorities sacrifices deep structure to a decorative surface echoes one of Carl Dahlhaus's weaker argu-

ments,⁶ Morgan accurately observes that, in basing new developments on essentially foreground events, composers surrendered the possibility of a universal language. Consequently, “a fixed and conventional conception of musical structure gave way to one that was variable, contingent, and contextual” (p. 453). Furthermore, this contingency could also be asserted for dodecaphony, “an essentially provisional method...consistently used by relatively few” (pp. 457-58).

While Morgan’s earlier article seems to argue an opposite point of view to the one embraced in the Norton volume, its thesis nevertheless does foreshadow the neomodernist prejudices of the later book. The author claims, for instance, that the proliferation of music written explicitly for the consumption of amateur musicians in the latter half of the nineteenth century engendered a malaise among serious composers. Barely masking an elitist bias, this striking pronouncement fails to account for the countervailing benefits of widespread music literacy; if there indeed were a “malaise,” it could more credibly be blamed on the stale conventionalism constraining composers within their own traditions than on the ability of the bourgeois public to appreciate them actively. Morgan’s article also displays a dismissive attitude toward composers who chose not to compose atonally after 1907. While he stops just short of deriding Scriabin as a composer of *kitsch*, Morgan shows no such restraint with Reger, regardless of that composer’s high standing in the eyes of such contemporaries as Schoenberg.

6. See Carl Dahlhaus, “Structure and Expression in the Music of Scriabin,” in *Schoenberg and the New Music*, trans. Derrick Puffet and Alfred Clayton (Cambridge, 1987), 201-09. In this article, Dahlhaus directly associates the concept of *kitsch* with both Reger and Scriabin. However, Dahlhaus’s emphasis on Scriabin’s “hackneyed sonorities” and modification of “banal” effects (pp. 204-05) draws attention away both from the amalgamation of Wagnerisms and late nineteenth-century traditions of Russian instrumental music in which Scriabin’s style is rooted and from means of formal organization which Dahlhaus does not mention. Ever the essentialist when discussing non-German music, Dahlhaus is as dismissive of Scriabin’s cultural context as he is of his musical metaphysics.

Still, the article's thoughtful critique of the question of common language raises the hope that Morgan's book-length essay on twentieth-century music might apply similar standards to the complex aesthetic questions raised throughout our century. Unfortunately, such is not the case, for contextual contingency and the absence of a common language equivalent to twelve-tone music are the very concepts with which the book seems least comfortable.

"Techno-Essentialism"

In my view, Morgan fails to heed his own call for revision because he is unable to shake ingrained patterns of thinking about twentieth-century music—patterns with which we all have been raised and which replicate themselves in book after book. Force of rhetorical repetition has displaced History to the point where it is exceedingly difficult to recoup the loss. Indeed, one cannot hope to do justice to the issues raised by Morgan's view of history without first confronting the particular self-perpetuating historiographic framework from which it and so many other efforts to write contemporary music history have sprung.

The chief element in this framework is an insistence on progress as the highest goal of aesthetic effort. Few cultural historians would quibble with the term if artistic "progress" were taken to mean a vigilant avoidance of stasis or an ongoing effort to contribute fresh, authentic works to the repertoire. But the idea of historical progress commonly perpetuated by most musicologists is a narrow one, according to which value judgments tend to be conditioned by abstract, measurable standards of technical progress, standards which may not be germane to an artwork's cultural significance.

For musicologists, the main appeal of a seemingly objective concept of progress lies in its reduction of the particularized concerns of context and style (both of which can diminish the elegance of comprehensive, essentializing models) to irrelevant, subjective surface phenomena. Since academic rigor usually implies a distrust of such subjectivity, few music historians would likely detect a contradiction between this distrust and the demands of interpreting aesthetic objects; rather, conditioned by a long tradition of Anglo-American pragmatist philosophy, many would view this suspicion as essential to the pursuit of empirical truth. At the same time, this suspicion would lead to the exclusion of elements that fail to conform to a model rigorously determined by systematically measurable phenomena and "proven" methodology. As Subotnik has suggested, the cultural contingency of this strict empiricism is hard to see, because the claim to absolute objectivity precludes, by definition, recognition of alternative points of view.⁷

Fueled by the idealization of progress in an emphatic sense, twentieth-century music historiography considers compositions authentic only when they redefine the nature of musical materials; in the rhetoric of composers like Boulez and Stockhausen, concern with developing existing materials or even acknowledgment of historical stylistic continuity deserves contempt.⁸ The patent-office approach ensures that composers who experiment with the structure of their materials will automatically be more highly valued than composers whose prime contribution lies in the less easily quantifiable dimension of

7. The latent Calvinism of the pragmatist myth explains the spiritual hold of empirical ways of thinking: "...the Continentalist [represented, in Subotnik's argument, by Adorno and French poststructural critics], in Catholic fashion, is more likely to allow for some awareness of the ideologies it rejects and to encompass a place, however lowly, despised, or even hellish, for those ideologies in its worldview; whereas the Anglo-American mode of thought, in traditional Protestant fashion, allows for freedom and equality of thought, but only within a very narrow range of the Elect, and simply disregards the human remainder" (Subotnik, *Developing Variations*, 12).

humanistic expression within existing genres and technical vocabularies. Often taken out of context, the rhetoric of the Viennese modernists and the anti-Romantic crusade of Stravinsky and several other interwar figures have inspired many more recent composers to tie the notion of progress in composition to a highly specific rhetoric of technology, while denigrating issues of subjective expression or poetic meaning. Historians have largely complied, intimidated, as Dahlhaus has argued, by a notion of science and scholarship that stands at odds with history.⁹

This trend toward a facile equation of science and art was identified by Theodor Adorno in his seminal study *The Philosophy of New Music*. Adorno defined the development of musical modernism primarily as a struggle between progress of external technology (represented by Stravinsky) and progress in the immanent "tendency of the material" (represented by Schoenberg).¹⁰ Both views, however, begin with the assumption that progress is the *sine qua non* of twentieth-century art. While the paths to this goal attributed by Adorno to the two composers differ, both routes ultimately are concerned with the linear evolution of technique. The Romantic fetishization of the individual, which twentieth-century commentators had decried in Romanticist aesthetics, was thus supplanted by a fetishization of technology.

In historical context, though, a broad rejection of individualism is clearly troubling. Cultural change from the end of World War I through the twenties was driven by a rejection of

8. Stockhausen's criticism of Bernd Alois Zimmermann is typical. In 1972, he labeled the recently deceased composer as a "*Gebrauchsmusiker*," because Zimmermann was a "transformer" of preexisting materials rather than a "generator" of new ones; see Wulf Konold, *Bernd Alois Zimmermann: Der Komponist und sein Werk* (Köln, 1986), 49.

9. Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), 26.

10. By "tendency of the material," Adorno meant the exploration of musical spaces through ever more sophisticated techniques of motivic variation.

the Romantic cult of individual expression in favor of a “new objectivity,” epitomized in France and Vienna by neoclassicism and in Berlin by the rise of antisubjective genres such as *Gebrauchsmusik* and *Zeitopern*. The last flowering of nineteenth-century individualism, the Expressionist movement of Schoenberg and George, was widely denounced in Germany by leftists and reactionaries alike as a degenerate protest of an elite intelligentsia, one that for all its artistic ambitions had removed the leading minds of its time from circulation at a moment when they might have devoted their energies to averting the war and its disastrous aftermath. In order to replace an expressive individuality thought to have been discredited, artists desperately sought a new concept of the subject rooted in an idealized collective. After the Second World War, in response to a similar impulse, Schoenberg’s idea of twelve-tone composition could easily be (mis)appropriated as a blueprint for elevating compositional predetermination over subjective expression. Schoenberg’s heated protests that his music’s roots lay in late nineteenth-century concepts of motivic development and in his own Expressionist style have never quite succeeded in dislodging this anti-individualist interpretation, which subsequently has become a rallying cry for his apologists.

However, as several contemporary intellectuals protested, the rush to embrace an alliance between a deindividualized collective and a technological machine was hardly an unqualified good. In the same year (1929) that Brecht, Weill, and Hindemith collaborated on the optimistic radio-cantata *Der Lindberghflug*, a work that celebrates technological achievement by deindividualizing the character of the flyer, Alfred Döblin published *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, a nightmare vision of an Everyman whose individuality is gradually crushed by the combined forces of social Darwinism and the mob.¹¹ It was no mere co-

11. Cf. Herbert Scherer, “The individual and the collective in Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz*,” trans. Peter and Margaret Lincoln, in *Culture and Society in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Keith Bullivant (Manchester, 1977).

incidence that the National Socialists chose to suppress Expressionist art while allowing the *Neue Sachlichkeit* to flourish.¹²

Although Adorno depicted the pursuit of technique at the expense of the individual as something more to be mourned than applauded, the idea, stripped of its disturbing sociological baggage, was eagerly received in American intellectual circles, where it reinforced the rhetoric of pragmatism and the giddy celebration of technological growth embodied in such phrases as "The American Century." To composers like Milton Babbitt, George Perle, Charles Wuorinen, and their colleagues, the twelve-tone techniques of Schoenberg and especially Webern, the rhythmic experiments of Stravinsky, and the symmetrical structures of Bartók all seemed to support their ideal of an antisubjective music, in which all dimensions of a musical utterance could be subsumed into a rigorous precompositional system. The vigorously anti-Romantic rhetoric of earlier composers (the Enlightenment diction of Schoenberg's twelve-tone articles, Stravinsky's half-ironic insistence on "expressionless" musical performance) was easily co-opted to support pseudoscientific values. Taken out of context, the techniques of early serialism—and the biographical image of its composers—could be adapted to an ascetic, anti-humanist projection of Anglo-American empiricism onto music. Ignoring or rationalizing away residual traces of nineteenth-century expressive gestures, theorists could recast composers like Webern and Berg as unfinished prototypes for the later total serialists. Schoenberg's retreat from the Viennese public was interpreted not as a response to particular socio-political pressures, but as a precedent for later composers to disregard both the larger public and the need to achieve communicable musical expression. American composers managed to forge an uneasy alliance between the private withdrawal epitomized in Expressionism and the sup-

12. Jost Hermand, "Unity within Diversity? The History of the Concept '*Neue Sachlichkeit*,'" trans. Peter and Margaret Lincoln, in *Culture and Society in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Keith Bullivant (Manchester, 1977), 180.

pression of the individual characteristic of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

Ironically, contemporary German critics of the “new objectivity” were especially suspicious of its American overtones. At the same time that fetishization of both technology and the collective was closely associated with “Fordism” and “Taylorism,” it was decried by moderate liberals as a proto-fascist assault on the autonomy of the individual.¹³ That fascism may have been viewed by some Germans in the late twenties as an American import, one which acquired its specifically German flavor only through the later propaganda of the Nazis, is a possibility that few Americans would willingly confront. The evidence of his Frankfurt cultural criticism suggests Adorno’s elaborate comparison in the *Jargon of Authenticity* between the rise of Nazism and the chief mechanisms of American capitalism—mass advertising, populism, glorification of technology—was likely formulated during the turbulent twenties.¹⁴

Against this backdrop, the enthusiastic embrace of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* rhetoric by certain American composers has troubling implications. Despite the fascistic subtext of the movement, American music historians have willingly complied with a historical revisionism that harmonized with their own preference for positivistically determined, clear, and distinct ideas whose philosophical underpinnings might aptly be termed “techno-essentialism.” Most English-language accounts of this century’s music stress an accrual of technical innovations along a smooth, linear course, explaining away occasional swerves, such as neoclassicism, as a matter of broad dialectics. *None* (to my knowledge) questions or defines the cultural contingency of the progress model itself.

However, the tenuous role of twentieth-century music within established performance and scholarly venues demands

13. Hermand, “Unity within Diversity?,” 174.

14. See Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston, 1973).

that techno-essentialist historiographic assumptions be carefully examined. On one hand, the public has been indisputably alienated from many of the leading developments of "modern music," through the voluntary retreat of composers from the public eye and, perhaps more damagingly, through the interference of conservative marketplace values in the public's access to new music. In this country, this drift has been catalyzed from one side by the narrow idea of canon fostered by the Music Appreciation movement of the forties and fifties and, from the other, by a cultural tendency toward populist values at any price.¹⁵ The role played by recorded sound in transforming music into an art for passive consumption has also been indicted as a catalyst in the decline of interest in contemporary serious music, as has the increasingly one-sided commitment of mainstream symphony orchestras and opera companies to a narrowing selection of "common practice" music.¹⁶ Though often motivated by the economic concerns of the groups involved, the narrowing canon of the concert hall has turned the concert experience into a repetitive affirmation of the familiar, in which the unfamiliar is treated as an unwelcome intrusion.¹⁷ In response to these forces, rightly perceived as hostile to new music, scholars have used the idea of a canon as a means of protecting the most seminal works of the avant-garde from

15. One piece of evidence for this assertion is that, in the literature on American culture published by the U.S. Information Agency for educational purposes abroad, modern American musical culture is represented as the sole province of rock, jazz, and popular artists (Bruce Springsteen, Michael Jackson), to the exclusion of any figures of the concert music scene. By contrast, the visual arts are represented by Jackson Pollock and other leading avant-garde figures, and literature by Pulitzer prize-winning authors—not by Stephen King, James Michener, or Jackie Collins.

16. Cf. Theodor Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York, 1988).

17. See Joseph Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini* (Minneapolis, 1988) and Theodor Adorno, "On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening," in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York, 1982).

public indifference. Unfortunately, the rigid, autocratic manner in which this defense is sometimes put into practice risks calling into question the validity of the very objects scholars wish to preserve.

At the same time, historical musicologists have, until recently, tended to avoid discussing contemporary music, arguing that we lack the distance necessary to determine which works will "stand the test of time." Musical works, it is widely assumed, must first meet rigorous essentialist criteria transcending historical context before they can be considered worthy of study. While this demand is a dilemma that confronts aesthetic criticism at every turn, uncritical adherence to the demand for essential value is more pronounced in America than in Europe, where music historians have remained demonstrably more engaged with (and governments have shown a greater material commitment to) contemporary art music.

Into the position vacated by musicologists have stepped, by default, composers and theorists whose training is neither historical in a critical, humanistic sense, nor philological. But, is not entrusting the writing of music history to the composers like leaving the writing of social and political history to politicians, with predictably dire consequences for the ideals of a critical, objective historiography? In such an environment, no matter how vigorously the author might wave the banner of objectivity, instincts for self-preservation and self-justification are bound to prevail, reshaping the "objective" view to suit the author's vested interests. Worse, in the absence of an active and disinterested critical voice, even an unconscious impulse toward self-justification can easily manifest itself in a subtle (but petty), self-aggrandizing revisionism.

For reasons that stem from the temporal nature of music and its uncomfortable relation to everyday life, music history is forced to rely on textbooks to an extent unique among the humanities and greater than most musicians would care to admit. The fact that works of music must be experienced as they unfold through time collides with the harsh fact that we have so

little time to give to this experience. While literature remains widely accessible and can be contemplated at the reader's convenience, while visual art can literally be taken in at a glance, music requires integral blocks of time and concentration in order to be absorbed, the involvement of trained and well-prepared performers, and an appropriate venue for presentation, live or recorded. Further compounding these difficulties is the easily documentable fact that, at a time when fragmentation of style places an ever greater burden upon what Subotnik has called "style competence," music literacy has become an increasingly scarce commodity.¹⁸

Responding defensively, musical "experts" of all types have been only too willingly tempted to assume roles as gatekeepers to the Great Masterworks, ready to protect themselves from outside criticism, cloaked in elitist claims of superior technical knowledge. Yet this pretense to superior knowledge plays to one of the greatest weaknesses of autocratically trained musicians: the tendency to believe that an intuitive, privileged access to musical understanding carries immunity from the inherently democratizing effects of critical historiography. Unless it is willing to examine its basic assumptions, however, the elitist stance of authority is more likely to alienate than convince a skeptical audience weary of tired tautological arguments. For the long-term survival of serious musical art, it is a serious mistake to exempt models of history based on a sanitized concep-

18. The question of style competence lies at the heart of the debate of structuralism vs. contextual criticism: "Though it requires less rigorous concentration than tonal competence [the ability to perceive tonal structures and operations], and thus in a sense is less demanding and more accessible, stylistic competence is by definition contingent and thus limited, rather than potentially universal on the basis of a common rationality, because it explicitly involves empirical elements outside the particular musical structure, elements that will be connected with the structure only by the specially trained or the culturally initiated" (Subotnik, *Developing Variations*, 200).

tion of "Masterpiece" or "Great Men" from vigorous critical examination.

Such attitudes will remain self-marginalizing so long as questions of individual style are consistently subordinated to the validation of highly specialized and, in many cases, prescriptive techniques. Ironically, this subordination stems from a desire to preserve the autonomy of the composer in the face of market forces and social apathy to contemporary composition. Yet the preservation of an autonomy for which the presence of concerned performers or audience members is irrelevant renders the composer's activity socially meaningless. This apparent meaninglessness, however, has not discouraged composers from continuing to pursue this narrow enclave of autonomy, for reasons that Subotnik ascribes to the complicity of a scholarly historiographical establishment that too crudely filters what it deems worthy of respect:

even among composers who in fact use their talents to acquire social patronage or fellowship support, few would openly admit to giving much consideration in the compositional process to any interests of a performer or an audience that might conflict with the composer's unbridled—or as the composer would say, uncompromised—self-expression. Certainly no composer would make such an admission who had any hopes of being taken seriously in academic music circles, where the history books are written.¹⁹

Because the scholarly establishment has a vested interest in determining the limited repertoire allowed performance in the elitist venues to which avant-garde music is confined, this "self-expression" is hardly as freely chosen as the rhetoric of autonomy implies. The restraints placed by this self-interest on mechanisms of value judgement are self-fulfilling:

Today, ordinary listeners have little control over which contemporary art works will actually reach their ears, especially since they have so little chance of being able to perform even the smaller works that they

19. *Ibid.*, 250.

might run across. The only socially safe course in judging contemporary art music is to rely on the intervention of classes of experts—scholars, critics, other composers—who perpetuate the standards of expertise, standards we are seldom any more competent to judge than we are to judge the music they mediate for us.²⁰

Considering the extent to which the larger public has grown estranged from the musical avant-garde (an estrangement exacerbated by the avant-garde's very parochialism), a revisionist historiography stands as the only corrective against the innately absolutist tendencies of those who monopolize the powers of perception.

Morgan's attempt to reflect recent changes in music aesthetics can be compared with a text which embraces wholeheartedly the techno-essentialist view, Bryan Simms's *Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer, 1986). Although Simms supplements the conventional story of twentieth-century music with worklists and biographical data for several composers who lie outside the normal functional canon (Lou Harrison, Karol Szymanowski, Gustav Holst), he seems unwilling to depart from accepted, usually negative evaluations of them, resorting to arguments in most cases conditioned by an essentialist preoccupation with radically determined pitch structures. Despite the broad scope suggested by his title, Simms gives no indication that serious twentieth-century music exists outside the Euro-American concert tradition; Morgan at least acknowledges the legitimacy of certain trends within "popular" styles as well as the importance of non-European styles and influences. Although Simms mentions such postmodern styles as "eclecticism," "neo-Romanticism," and "minimalism," he couches his survey in a celebration of "emancipation" as the governing ethic of twentieth-century musical production (p. xiii). Modernism is construed, then, as a grand allegory of burgeoning democracy in which the disturbing relation between modernist aesthetics and reactionary politics plays no

20. *Ibid.*, 251.

part. Furthermore, Simms confidently announces that “the patterns of growth in music during the two decades following World War II [by which he means a prioritization of “innovation and experiment”] are now relatively clear” (p. 420). He represents pluralism as a recent development, one which postdates a tradition of allegedly unified avant-gardism, and is loosely equated with a “new conservatism.” This argument requires some chronological sleight-of-hand, for among “recent” musics he counts theatrical works dating back to 1947 (p. 431), while “happening music” (his term for Cage’s contribution) and minimalism are traced back to the 1950s. Had his view been truly historical, he would have had to reconcile the coexistence of emphatically progressive and significant nonprogressive styles. Perhaps Simms’s most astonishing (and woefully familiar) pronouncement, though, is that we cannot judge the worth of contemporary music because it has not yet “stood the test of time” (pp. 437–38), a sentiment echoed as recently as John Thow’s review of Morgan.²¹ Unwilling to confront the complicated aesthetic issues involved in value judgement, Simms allows a litmus test of technical progressiveness to stand in their place.

Historiography versus the Techno-Essentialist Prejudice

In comparison with Simms, Morgan seems to embrace the responsibilities of contemporary historiography. Sensitive to the pluralistic climate of music research today, he is especially to be lauded for recognizing the legitimate claims of “popular music,

21. “Critical literature of this music clearly needs the Times Square Ball to land, the corks to pop, and a decade or so of reflection before any evaluation of twentieth-century music can become meaningful” (*Notes* 49, no. 1 [1992]: 124).

folk music, and jazz, as well as non-Western music" (p. xiii). Although he still limits his scope to western art music, he portrays the omission of "other musics" as a methodological limitation rather than a value judgement:

Since the increasing interaction of these "other" musics with concert music forms a distinctive feature of the modern tradition, such a discussion is necessarily problematic. However given the constraints of space, it seemed unwise to try to cover such a rich and varied field, itself encompassing many different types of music, each with its own tradition, in the highly synoptic manner necessary within a more general survey. (p. xiii)

By simple acknowledgment, Morgan averts the colonialist assumptions that have marred other modern music surveys. Indeed, his treatment of several styles that draw emphatically from non-western or vernacular musical languages—from Ives and Weill to Lou Harrison, Stockhausen, and Takemitsu, to such iconoclastic, "experimental" composers as Cowell, Partch, and Cage—shows a greater attention to nuance than is reflected in his approach to styles that are for other reasons tonally "conservative."

Ives is particularly well served by Morgan's approach, a hardly surprising fact given his scholarly interest in the composer.²² One of the book's longest discussions of a single person (pp. 138-48), the section devoted to Ives's music treats the experimental and prophetic aspects of his style not as a *sine qua non*, but as part of a historical context which includes biography and discusses borrowings from vernacular song, the patchwork stylistic impact of juxtaposed diatonic and dissonantly chromatic elements, popular music types (p. 144), and the elusive sense of unity imparted by Ives's philosophical attitude toward his materials (p. 143). The result is a variegated picture

22. Cf. Morgan's "Rewriting Music History: Second Thoughts on Ives and Varese," *Musical Newsletter* 3, no. 1 (1973): 3; 3, no.2 (1973): 15; and "Ives and Mahler: Mutual Responses at the End of an Era," *Nineteenth-Century Music* 2 (1978): 72.

whose attention to historical and cultural context, recent Ives scholarship, and the specific dynamics of a wide range of pieces is exemplary.

At the same time, the section calls special attention to Ives's experiments with new pitch-organizing devices (pitch series, quarter tones) and greets less emphatically experimental works with apparent regret (p. 140). While renewed emphasis on experimentation and novelty is hardly inappropriate here, the reasons Morgan gives for their importance lead to a distortion that betrays a larger historiographic project:

In 1965 the first complete performance of the Fourth Symphony attracted particular interest, and the work was hailed as a major monument of modern music. One principal reason for this belated success was that many of the new compositional techniques Ives had introduced, such as multiple tempos, polydimensional textures, and microtonal tunings, had since taken their place as part of the basic vocabulary of the post-World War II period. Ives had become a prophet, and the musical world had finally caught up with him. (p. 148)

Since Morgan connects Ives to European Romanticism without once mentioning Emerson or transcendentalism, his description obscures the possible connection between the work's success and its fusion of styles and musical sign-systems into a compelling reflection in music of Ives's transcendentalist philosophy. Arguably, the symphony's posthumous success stemmed at least as much from these latter factors as from the techniques that had become part of the common language of avant-garde composers. While a few members of the 1965 audience might have taken the work as a "prophetic" validation of their own efforts, it is safe to assume that that would have been a minority reaction. By dropping all mention of Ives's personal, inimitable stylistic voice for the last page of the section, Morgan leaves the reader with the impression that Ives should be valued primarily for his introduction of new technical devices.

Morgan's treatment of Bernd Alois Zimmermann, a composer who self-consciously pursued a "*musikalische Pluralis-*

mus," suggests a general approach to eclecticism in keeping with a techno-essentialist agenda. Not well known in this country for reasons that have less to do with its quality than with the negative reception of his music by Karl-Heinz Stockhausen and the Darmstadt circle, Zimmermann's work has been savaged by American critics (when it has been noticed at all).²³ In his survey, for instance, Bryan Simms condemns the opera *Die Soldaten* for piling "quotations from all eras of musical history into an olio of provocative but un-unified sounds" (p. 402). Morgan, on the other hand, characterizes Zimmermann as "the first composer since Ives to deal extensively with quotation" (p. 411), cites the *Musique pour les soupers du roi Ubu* (1966) as a work consisting entirely of quotations, and, after listing the various textural elements combined in the score of *Die Soldaten*, likens Zimmermann's only opera to Berg's *Lulu*.

Yet, despite a sympathetic portrayal of the work's eclecticism, Morgan confesses what he finds truly attractive:

The fact that despite its quotations, the opera is fundamentally serial in conception is revealing. Quotation technique and serialism may seem far removed from each other, yet they share at least one essential attribute: in both, the composer begins the compositional process with "pre-formed" material...and manipulates it through various combinational and permutational methods. (p. 412)

By emphasizing this common denominator, Morgan seems to imply a value system in which the use of "pre-formed" material becomes a prerequisite for serious achievement. Conversely, failure to rely on such predetermined elements, and failure to limit the act of composition to "combinational and permutational operations" would be construed as a sign of artistic failure. Music based primarily on *ad hoc* motivic development, the structure of a text, or traditional formal processes—in other words, music driven by the "subjective" engagement of

23. Eric Salzmann, for instance, fails to mention him (*Twentieth-Century Music: An Introduction*, 2d edn. [Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1974]); see also note 8.

the composer—would, it follows, be automatically relegated to secondary status, even if its materials were demonstrably “modern” in other respects. It is perhaps no coincidence that the kinds of music which Morgan tends to dismiss fall into this “subjective” category, whereas the styles he favors reflect what he might consider to be a degree of compositional preformation, either through serial techniques, montage, quotation, or the rigorous exploitation of specific sonorities. Ultimately, however, such emphasis on “pre-formed” material is as contingent a litmus test for historical value as the preoccupation with unity encountered in many other surveys.

In other cases as well, Morgan’s approach to musical pluralism echoes the revisionistic strategies of his treatment of Ives and Zimmermann. On one hand, composers like Ives, Varese, and Partch seem for him to constitute a vital tradition of eclecticism spanning the century. On the other, he groups together western composers who incorporate nonwestern elements, women composers, African-American composers, the emergence of serious styles within originally popular genres such as jazz and rock, and the continuing presence of older works in the repertoires of establishment operatic and symphonic venues in a single section titled “The Culture of Musical Pluralism” (pp. 484-86). The chapter titled “The New Pluralism” broadens the spectrum still further to include “post-serial” music—such as Cage’s aleatory experiments—and neo-Romanticism. “Pluralism” is, then, employed by the book in at least four substantially different ways: to denote semiotic eclecticism, as represented by Ives and Varese in America, Berio and Zimmermann in Europe; to denote “post-serial” music; to denote a serious consideration of popular and vernacular music; and to denote so-called “ethnic” influence. Unfortunately, by intermingling so many contradictory definitions, he renders the term useless. The inclusion of African-Americans and women under the rubric “pluralism,” rather than in the context of the particular stylistic currents to which these composers have contributed, is especially disturbing, since it perpetuates a

binary model of “mainstream” music and its “Other,” paying shallow courtesy to the concept of a pluralistic society.

The fact that Morgan sees a need to argue the merits of serialism even in the introduction to a chapter devoted to the idea of musical pluralism claims a universality for serialism that contradicts the argument of his 1984 *Critical Inquiry* article:

Music since the 1960s is often referred to as “post-serial”—a usage that may seem to ascribe to serialism a disproportionate importance, considering the limited span of time during which it dominated contemporary Western composition. But the designation is apt because of the special historical position serialism occupied, as—for now and probably for some time to come—the last compositional development shared by enough composers of different stylistic persuasions and nationalities to have represented a sort of common, if not “universal,” musical language. (p. 407)

By stating that the term “post-serial” is dependent upon the conceptual importance of serialism, Morgan in effect implies that “post-serial” music is inherently unable to sustain itself. He argues that one “post-serial” style, the chance music introduced by Cage, was hardly “universal” since it never achieved institutional status and, in Morgan’s view (echoing statements ubiquitous in the writings of Boulez and Wuorinen) flouted the spirit of historical necessity possessed by serialism:

Cage opted for indeterminacy, but of course there was no “necessity” in his decision. In fact, perhaps Cage’s most far-reaching perception in the 1950s was his assumption that there were no longer any shared guidelines, that each composer had to make entirely personal—and thus essentially “arbitrary”—choices. (pp. 407-08)

It is debatable whether “necessity” and “arbitrary,” used as they are here, belong in the vocabulary of an objective historiographer. Nor, for that matter, can it be convincingly argued that serial styles have been any more “institutional” than the allegedly “arbitrary” styles which Morgan rejects, even if inquiry is limited to academic institutions. Furthermore, as a criterion

of quality, institutional support cannot withstand scrutiny. The most superficial scan of music history reveals a litany of composers who have had at best an ambivalent relationship to vested interests. Imagine for a moment what a history of nineteenth-century music with such an emphasis would look like: a tapestry populated by A. B. Marx, Saint-Saëns, d'Indy, Thomas, and many lesser, forgotten composers, with very little room for the Berliozes, Schuberts, and Liszts of this world. Had it been applied during their lifetimes, even composers within Morgan's pantheon, like Ives and Bartók, would have failed Morgan's test.

Moreover, his definition of "institution" is unduly limited. It does not include performance venues, though it is obvious from a historiographic standpoint that it should. And despite its reputation, serialism has been a dominant concern only for certain academic facilities in America, a few leading European institutions with a prominent profile in America, such as IRCAM and the Darmstadt Summer School, and, of course, for music history textbooks, which perpetuate a cultural image far removed from reality. Serialism has not been the major focus of many leading European and Russian composers or institutions. Nor can its universality be claimed even for America, where so many academic institutions in the Midwest, the West Coast, and even New York have developed energetic and respected faculties for whom serial techniques were a minor consideration. Composers like George Crumb and George Rochberg can hardly be counted among "new" postserial voices, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich and Olly Wilson (whom Morgan relegates to the margins of women and African-American composers) are arguably more representative of mainstream American institutional music than composers like George Perle and Milton Babbitt. Even Cage-inspired experimentation, which Morgan claims to lack institutional validation, has been a primary concern for many comfortably tenured composers. Upon examination, Morgan's serial "universe" seems severely circumscribed.

Morgan's book is at its most promising when it presents the centrality of historical and cultural contexts. The author precedes each of the three large sections into which the book is divided with a concise overview of leading contemporary political and cultural developments. The significance of these developments is described not only in connection with compositions that have arisen in direct response to political events, such as Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw*, Penderecki's *Threnody*, or the middle Shostakovich symphonies, but as an indispensable dimension of any musical art work.

At the same time, the background accounts of individual works or composers are often superficial. Texted works are never discussed in terms of their poetic message or the role of this message in defining their cultural meaning, even when this cultural meaning is a primary motivation for the work's creation. Hence a work like Zimmermann's emotionally shattering *Die Soldaten* is presented without reference to its central poetic theme (the brutalization of women in a militaristic society) or to the particular attractions of the source text (that the eighteenth-century writer J. M. R. Lenz offered a model for the circular temporality that became a hallmark of Zimmermann's own music aesthetics). The "purely musical" approach both sanitizes the artwork and deprives it of meaning in a manner which Carl Dahlhaus warned against:

When we reduce vocal pieces to absolute music by listening to them "instrumentally" ... we subject them to an aesthetic for which they were not intended and against which they most often fall short.²⁴

When he does discuss context, Morgan focuses upon background currents that validate his own teleological historiography instead of trying to let each epoch speak for itself. The account of Europe at the turn of the century, for example, emphasizes colonial expansion, scientific breakthroughs, and the

24. Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 6.

growth of industrialism, factors which, while important, were more relevant to the age of Adam Smith than at the brink of our own century. He defines the spirit of the age in terms of Darwinism, quoting Stephan Zweig's description of the faith in progress shared by the pre-World War I generation (p. 12). By contrast, Freud's questioning of Enlightenment beliefs is portrayed as an afterthought to the explosion of those beliefs by the Great War (p. 13), preoccupations with gender construction (which left an indelible imprint on music drama of the day) go unmentioned, and, in general, the humanistic and individualistic currents of the century's first decade are downplayed to the point of distortion.

Although he acknowledges that the war engendered widespread cultural pessimism, the seeds of which were sown well before its outbreak, Morgan erroneously treats the development of expressionist tendencies in art as an unrelated phenomenon, as an intensification of a Romantic cult of the individual rather than as an awakening consciousness of the human potential for evil. Yet the view of the individual that dominated the last decades of the nineteenth century was without doubt a realist or even a naturalist one. The writers that defined the generation of the eighties and nineties—Zola, Hauptmann, Ibsen, George Eliot, Henry James—were variously concerned with a "photographic" representation of events, free from stylization or exaggeration. When these factors are taken into account, the distortions of reality contained in the various genres of expressionism are revealed unequivocally as twentieth-century phenomena, inspired more by Freud's horrific visions of dream and psychosis than by vestiges of a Byronic sensibility.

The book's neglect of cultural and textual issues is not inconsequential, for it leads to serious distortions in its account of musical works. The worst misrepresentation is that of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, whose denigration in 1936 as "Chaos Instead of Music" leaves Morgan completely baffled:

This article [the *Pravda* article which abruptly attacked the work at the height of its popularity] marked an important turning point in Soviet attitudes toward contemporary music, which from this moment on were to be consistently repressive. Exactly why this particular work was singled out as an example has never been clear, for it is considerably more consonant, more "melodic," and more openly tonal than the Second Symphony, Shostakovich's earlier satiric opera *The Nose* (1928), or the ballet *The Golden Age* (1930). Probably it was simply due to *Lady Macbeth's* great success and the prominence of its composer, while the unusual international attention it attracted also may have raised suspicions that it was catering to the decadent tastes of the West. (p. 246)

Nowhere in this account is there reference to Stalin's puritanical reaction to the grossly explicit music of the act I seduction scene, which led to the coinage of the term "pornophony," or to those elements of plot that could be guaranteed to arouse his anger (especially the portrayal of Katerina, who, despite her murderously anarchic revolt against the repressive males in her life, is transformed into a sympathetic figure). The phrase "consonant, melodic and openly tonal" no better describes the particularity of Shostakovich's style than it would the style of Wagner or Rachmaninoff. There is no mention of the juxtaposition of searing dissonance, white-hot lyricism, and ironic "circus music" (used to lampoon institutional authority figures) that makes the work such a disturbing theatrical experience. In the absence of any mention of the work's subversive aspects, Morgan's curious suggestion that the ban might have been a matter of jealousy rings hollow. Though not strictly inaccurate, the failure of this brief passage to pinpoint obvious reasons for the ban shows the danger of ignoring aspects of opera that lie outside the domain of absolute music.

While a misreading of cultural context limits the usefulness of the Shostakovich entry, a seeming antipathy for a composer is in other cases conveyed at the expense of factual substance. A clear instance is Morgan's entry on Hans Pfitzner, which, though carrying a separate section heading, consists solely of the following information: that his music is rarely performed

outside Germany, that he is a “child of the nineteenth century,” whose music, “though intelligent,” “never passes beyond the limits of late Romantic tonal and harmonic practice,” and that he wrote a rebuttal to Busoni’s 1917 avant-garde treatise *Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music* (p. 38). Failing to engage Pfitzner’s argument in any detail, Morgan’s account of the debate casts Pfitzner as an uninteresting straw-figure: Busoni’s intelligence is pitted against traditionalist aesthetics, universality against provincialism, progressivism against stale orthodoxy. We learn that Pfitzner was a reactionary without gaining a clue as to what might have made his music interesting in its own terms or even what it might have sounded like beyond the caricature of nineteenth-century style given by Morgan. No mention is made of either his relationship to cultural figures of his day or his innovations in texture and orchestration (though they were widely admired by the Viennese avant-garde).²⁵ The 1915 opera *Palestrina* is described as his “most representative work,” though it is by no means clear what we should understand it to represent; the palpable Wagnerism of its style is not mentioned, nor is the plot discussed apart from the idea that it is based on an apocryphal episode in the life of the Italian composer. Yet even a cursory reading of the literature about the composer—from Bekker, Mann, and Schoenberg to, more recently, Peter Franklin, Peter Heyworth, and especially John Williamson’s excellent critical-analytical biography—suggests that the space devoted to applying empty labels to Pfitzner could have been more effectively and informatively used.²⁶

The use of the concept of conservatism to deindividualize and derogate a composer like Pfitzner calls attention to a pattern running throughout the book in which ideologically slanted jargon is used to enforce aesthetic segregation. Terms associ-

25. The opening bars of *Der Rose vom Liebesgarten* can be seen as an oblique precursor of *Klangfarbenmelodie*. John Williamson provides a thoughtful consideration of this relationship in *The Music of Hans Pfitzner* (Oxford, 1992), 115-18.

ated with nineteenth-century aesthetics are consistently transformed into pejoratives. The word "traditional"—like "German," "Romantic," "tonal," "conservative," and "Wagnerian"—is used almost exclusively to explain why a style should be uninteresting from a modernist perspective. Morgan's rejection of the nineteenth century is epitomized in his attitude toward individuality and its corollary, stylistic particularity. His rejection of these concepts as outmoded Romantic notions provides the kernel of his sympathy with the technocratic currents in postwar music and of his tendency to prioritize precompositional theory over stylistic result. This is also made clear in his preface, where he emphasizes an assumed breakdown of "individuals" and personal style, and agonizes over the selection of a starting date (1907) that will emphasize the modernist rejection of the past:

In this process of selection the more conservative composers tend to be neglected; although many attained positions of great prominence in their own day, they rarely exerted a long-range influence. This in itself reflects a point of great historical significance: musical modernism has defined itself more through emphasis on the new, on what was musically unprecedented and thus distinct from the older tradition, than through any other single attribute. (p. xiv)

One might reply to Morgan that musical modernism has by no means "defined itself"; rather, it has been defined by composers and their apologists. Morgan conveniently omits mention of those strands of modernism that have not been defined in the terms he sets. He has room only for styles that draw their vitality from sophisticated techniques of systematization, like total serialism.

26. See Peter Franklin, *The Idea of Music: Schoenberg and Others* (Houndmills and London, 1985), 117-38; Peter Heyworth, *Otto Klemperer, His Life and Times* (Cambridge, 1983); and John Williamson, *The Music of Hans Pfitzner* (Oxford, 1992). Williamson's book was not yet available when Morgan published his history.

Yet, one might also object, even where total serialism has been adopted as the governing principle, it is debatable whether the serial dimension *per se* is the most salient stylistic characteristic of the music. In the case of Brian Ferneyhough (of whom Morgan provides a particularly warm description), the listener will almost certainly be struck more by the textural and formal intensity of his music than by the particularities of its pitch structure. Conversely, the music of a "lyric" composer of dodecaphonic music, like George Perle, shows more similarities with the style of an Andrew Imbrie or Ernst Krenek than with that of a declared post-Schoenbergian like Charles Wuorinen. In the absence of a historical mandate for the continued development of serial techniques, success in such dimensions as rhetoric, texture, and rhythm will likely provide the most coherent basis for continuing to value the works of serial composers.

Reshaping the Conventional Picture

An honest response to the changing spectrum of music in a "post-serial" age would, of course, have to remedy the neglect and condescension that have been habitually visited on much of this century's most historically important (and, by all outward signs, most enduring) music. This would entail a reorientation of familiar historical and stylistic categories as well as the formulation of certain new ones. Here, in rough outline, are a few suggested categories, along with an evaluation of Morgan's treatment of them, which may serve as a fair indication of how the techno-essentialist tradition has usually dealt with these issues:

I. *Weltanschauungsmusik*

In the volume of the *Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft* (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1984) devoted to twentieth-century music, Hermann Danuser coins the term *Weltanschauungsmusik* to characterize works resulting from the preoccupation with metaphysical issues shared by a wide range of composers from different cultural backgrounds between 1910 and 1920 (p. 24). This preoccupation is reflected in both the huge projects that were left incomplete (despite having been the primary objects of their composers' efforts during this decade) and in a handful of completed works that attempted to fuse eschatology with more manageable forms, such as the dramatic cantata (Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, Delius's *Mass of Life*) or the symphony with voices (Mahler's Eighth and *Das Lied von der Erde*, Ives's Fourth, Alexander Zemlinsky's *Lyrische Symphonie*). Danuser fills out his chapter with analyses of *Die Jakobsleiter*, the *Mysterium* sketches of Skryabin, and Ives's *Central Park in the Dark*, each of which is presented as a separate aspect of a shared, contemporary problem. In his view, these "metaphysical conceptions" were no epigonal last flowering of late Romanticism, but a primary concern for the composers who were most convinced that tonal conventions were on the verge of exhausting themselves. Understanding these remarkable works, which were viewed with enormous seriousness by leading modernists at the time, is indispensable for identifying the subtle shifts in terrain that led composers of highly chromatic music to make the leap to atonality. These works also help explain how a composer like Schoenberg could maintain artistic allegiance with ambitious composers who remained committed to tonality, such as Zemlinsky and Franz Schreker.

Detaching atonal music from the context of pre-War culture has prevented us from seeing how contemporary philosophical preoccupations may have conditioned harmonic experimentation. Works like Schoenberg's *Erwartung* and his treatise *Harmonielehre* attempt to relate contemporary psycho-

analytic theories to music, and throughout the period references abound to a post-Romantic art-religion that was more heartfelt than revisionist American modernists would like to admit. The historian's problem becomes one of using this philosophical and cultural backdrop to resolve seeming paradoxes. In order to reconcile Schoenberg's radical break with his earlier Wagnerian style, for example, we must learn to see ways in which he could embrace the *Gurrelieder* as a work contemporary with the *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, op. 16.

Compounding the empiricist's traditional mistrust of theosophy, today's anti-expressive, anti-individualist viewpoint tends to dismiss the idea of *Weltanschauungsmusik* on the very grounds that it involves elements outside the realm of pure music as valid music-historical tools. The practical consequence of this stance, however, is that mature masterpieces routinely have been treated as marginal specimens of their composer's oeuvre. Morgan is no exception: for him, the *Gurrelieder* merits no more than a fleeting mention as a "Wagnerian" (in his usage, regressive) work for large orchestra (p. 63); the *Mass of Life* is only listed; Franz Schmidt (*Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln*) is not mentioned; the *Mysterium* is an afterthought, linked to Scriabin's egotism (p. 61); the pertinent Mahlerian works are explicitly cast as throwbacks (p. 21); and even Ives's preoccupation with New England Transcendentalism goes unmentioned when his works are treated as examples of musical techniques.

2. Janáček

Conforming neither to the Schoenbergian nor the neoclassical model of musical modernism, Janáček has been a problematic composer for most historical surveys. The extraordinary rhythmic energy and subtlety of his music (as with that of his countryman Bohuslav Martinu, whom Morgan never mentions) stems from his close study of speech rhythms, leading the Moravian to be classified in most accounts as a folklorist, significant only as a mere nationalist. But the extraordinary

success of Janáček's music on the British and American stage is hardly a sign that he is merely Czech in his appeal. Rather, the brutal realism and lyric-declamatory flexibility of Janáček's dramatic writing, its unprecedented combination of lyric concision and rhythmic agitation, and its objective dispensation of block-textural fragments contradict the notion that his music is conservative. While recognizing all of these qualities, Morgan raises the (for him) inevitable question of long-range influence. Suddenly, the techno-essentialist myth of musical progress becomes the measure of Janáček's importance: why did Janáček fail to influence the mainstream musical evolution?

Although he actually anticipated Bartók's evolution in certain striking respects...Janáček was considerably less influenced by the "progressive" elements in twentieth-century music than was his Hungarian colleague. In any event it was Bartók who came to be viewed as the dominant compositional voice of Eastern Europe during the first half of the century. (p. 119)

This is no mere transition to Bartók, who had been described in a previous chapter, but a crude and irrelevant comparison. The assumption that there should be but a single, dominating voice of Eastern Europe is condescending and culturally untenable.

3. Opera

One insupportable assertion in Morgan's discussion of Janáček is that "opera, his main creative area, has lost in the twentieth century the central position it enjoyed in musical developments of the preceding" (p. 119). Later, in a section devoted to Benjamin Britten, he describes opera as "a genre...that has by and large been confined to a secondary position during the twentieth century" (p. 277). While true from the standpoint of bourgeois theatrical history, the notion that opera has not been a central concern of twentieth-century composers is bizarre. Morgan's apathy toward the genre is apparent in his in-

sistence upon matters of pitch structure, to the exclusion of the dramatic or social meanings that drive music. Only when he discusses Kurt Weill do dramatic issues intrude on his narrative of the purely musical; he overlooks similar opportunities with Richard Strauss, Henze, Zimmermann, and Britten.

The arbitrary neglect of an entire genre may be a reflection of the fact that music theorists, taking far too literally Schoenberg's (and Schenker's) dismissive writings about verbal texts, habitually ignore words when analyzing music. But a rhetorical omission motivated by prejudice against texted music manifestly warps the historical picture. While composers who spend profitable careers writing for the operatic stage have indeed been scarce in this century, and the few who have succeeded in this manner (Puccini, Mascagni, Strauss, Menotti) have tended to be tonally, and artistically, "conservative," contemporary opera has itself moved away from the conventions and social connotations of the bourgeois repertory opera that made such careers possible. Accordingly, opera by pathbreaking composers (tonally conservative or not) disappeared from mainstream opera houses even as its potential for serious expression rose in the eyes of the composers themselves. For many twentieth-century composers, opera became a forum for countercultural social commentary, or a framework in which a compositional style could be given its fullest expression. The idea of opera, in short, became equated with the idea of the magnum opus; few composers who have written operas in this century have failed to regard these works as their greatest creations. Composers like Copland, Corigliano, and Stravinsky, who have treated opera casually, have been far outweighed by composers like Schoenberg, Hindemith, Busoni (*Doktor Faust*), Sessions (*Montezuma*), Zimmermann, Penderecki (*Die Teufel von Loudon*), and Messiaen (*St. Francois d'Assise*), whose operas are compendia of their life's work. Morgan's relentless denial of opera's claim to modernity (the "conservative" Britten is dispensed with in a section on pre-World War II music) overlooks the obvious. His thesis is powerless to explain the careers of Berg, whose most

important works are operas, or Henze, whose efforts to radicalize and subvert the conventions of opera Morgan wrongly dismisses as "conventional" (p. 457). Nor can it explain the recent art-religious *Gesamtkunstwerke* of Stockhausen, a composer who, like Messiaen, is restricted in Morgan's narrative to the role of precursor to the serial techniques of more "central" composers like Boulez and Babbitt.

4. The Nordic-Slavic Symphonic Tradition

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing future twentieth-century music studies is the need to draw coherent patterns from styles whose relative indifference to a progressivist agenda has caused them routinely to be dispersed to the margins of historical accounts. One area ripe for rehabilitation is the rich tradition of large-scale symphonic writing, mostly tonal but stark in its language, that has proliferated in regions where the fetish for serial techniques and other forms of experimentation has had negligible impact. While indifference to serialism and other emphatically progressive techniques may in some cases be attributable to rank conservatism, a simple dismissal on these grounds risks distortion of the real historical value of the symphonic repertory produced by Russian, Scandinavian, and British composers.

In a sense, the reception problem of the contemporary symphony was foreshadowed by the problem presented by the pre-1920 symphony. While Mahler could, because of his pervasively elegiac tone, be written off as an epigon and Shostakovich could be pitied on account of Stalinist constraints, no such excuse could help Sibelius. Savaged by avant-garde critics like Adorno and vigorously championed by reactionaries, Sibelius is a case study of a composer whose genuine claim to modernity was obscured by aesthetic politics.

A common denominator among many of the "Northern" styles is the role of Bruckner as a model. Just as Bruckner's symphonies shift emphasis away from conventional notions of

theme and prescriptive formal outlines toward the use of objective, patterned juxtapositions of diffuse block textures to generate large-scale waves of kinetic energy, so Sibelius progressively abandons the Tchaikovskian thematic constructions of the Second Symphony in favor of a post-Brucknerian approach to texture in such works as the Seventh Symphony and *Tapiola*. The concentration on structural kinetics lends itself to the eclectic incorporation of modernistic devices (bitonality, prolonged nonfunctional dissonance and a *sachlich* juxtaposition of textures) or, in the works of the late Gustav Allen Pettersen, an incipient kind of minimalism.

Morgan's discussions of this tradition, clearly foreign to his own aesthetics, is predictably dispersed among sections devoted to national styles and "other currents." His account of Sibelius largely avoids condescension, though a gratuitous comparison to the experiments of Schoenberg (p. 122) robs an otherwise perceptive assessment of its impact. Nielsen, in Morgan's description, fares even worse, for compared with Sibelius his music is lightweight, formally conventional, and tonally conservative (pp. 123-24). He misses an opportunity to demonstrate the intensely modernistic qualities of a work like the Sixth Symphony, whose flippant, almost postmodern irony foreshadows the aesthetics of a much later generation. The discussion of Shostakovich is limited to reconciling the effectiveness of the music with its conservatism, leading Morgan to such non sequiturs as "despite its relative uncomplexity, the Fifth Symphony is a work of obvious artistic conviction" (p. 248).

Contemporary exponents of the symphonic tradition go virtually unnoticed by Morgan. Neither Pettersen nor the unabashed Brucknerian Robert Simpson is even mentioned. The significant contributions to the modernist symphony by such major avant-garde composers as Lutoslawski, Schnittke, and Edison Denisov are also ignored.

Style, Context, and the "Functional Canon"

If Robert Morgan fails to grapple convincingly with these issues, it is because his view of history, despite his anti-individualist rhetoric, paradoxically privileges the idea of the Great Composer; while musical significance resides in the development of rigorous techniques, those who do so are accorded a transcendental status. Yet because he is unwilling to explore idiosyncrasy except as it contributes to his particular, favored technical concerns, he is led ultimately to reject style in its widest sense as a primary historiographic category. This, plus his apparent ignorance of much of the repertoire he dismisses (Henze's operas, for instance), may explain why he so rarely penetrates beneath the most superficial stylistic observation. His preoccupation with the evolution of technical devices blinds him to both the dynamics of genre and the shifting nature of musical institutions. The reader actually learns less about individual style, genre, and the institutional control of modernist taste from Morgan than from many books with a similar agenda, raising fundamental doubts as to the need for such a book at a time when the avant-garde finds itself in transition.

As long as the underlying, oxymoronic assumptions of an essentialist historiography go unquestioned, it is likely that the chief problems of Morgan's book—its validation of the conservative, academic avant-garde and neglect of styles irrelevant to its aesthetic agenda—will be repeated by later authors. That would be unfortunate, because hiding behind this status quo will only further the marginalization of contemporary concert music from the mainstreams of American cultural life, if it is not already a *fait accompli*.

But this need not be the case, because models already exist for a contextualizing view of twentieth-century music. In the preface to his *Die Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Hermann Danuser argues that the strict observance of national boundaries is

cripplingly anachronistic when it comes to writing the history of our century's music. The categories he develops, accordingly, focus on the evolution of genres and the development of musical and artistic institutions. At all times, the emergence of new techniques is situated within cultural context, allowing more discussion of individual works, fresher insights, and the drawing of more interdisciplinary connections than any of his American colleagues.

While some might object that Danuser, as a German writing for a German audience, disproportionately emphasizes certain European styles neglected by American historians, Morgan's account of post-War German and European styles is arguably far more dismissive than is Danuser's treatment of Ives, Babbitt, Cage, or Carter. Morgan's advocacy of the American climate appears at times jingoistic, as when he praises "this country's particular role in nourishing the more experimental strains that form one of the century's enduring and characteristic features" (p. xiii). Actually, it would be more accurate to claim that the only "experimental strains" to have gathered material nourishment in this country belong to the narrow stylistic spectrum that has made a specific appeal to empirical, scientific taste. As for Morgan's claims for the worldwide significance of this country's contemporary music, it is clear that he has not talked to many Europeans. Even in this country, it is likely that the music of Messiaen, Lutoslawski, Boulez, Ligeti, and, lately, Schnittke, Gubaidulina, and Maxwell Davies, has exercised a greater impact on compositional trends than has the music of even the greatest of America's avant-garde, Elliott Carter and Milton Babbitt.

Morgan's brand of historiography, which prizes rhetorical coherence over historical accuracy, is more comfortable with the regulated or mandated "normality" of common practice than with the alternative task of historiography: the reconstruction of the particular conditions (social, historical, and immanent) that led to the production of artworks and fueled the dynamics of their reception. Indeed, his appeal to the "long-range

influence” of a given composer rules out this task. The suspicion of individuality and expression voiced in his preface renders his history autocratic and anti-historical in its sympathies.

So does his persistent search for evidence of historical “necessity.” Perhaps in his insistence on a necessary connection between technology and music-historical development, on the need to establish orderly patterns of historical consequence, Morgan has forgotten Schoenberg’s prescient critique of such governing assumptions:

Consequence is not an exigency of art. That is wherein art and science differ principally. While science has to demonstrate its problems perfectly and has therefore to proceed systematically, logically and consequently, art presents only a certain number of *interesting* cases....To mention such commonplace wisdom should appear superficial, were it not that the theorists always fall into the error of believing their theories to be rules for composers instead of symptoms of the works, rules which a composer has to obey, instead of peculiarities which are extracted from the works.²⁷

The extremes of rhetoric to which Morgan resorts in order to justify his neglect of styles outside the techno-essentialist canon suggests two things. First, these supposedly peripheral styles have a claim to centrality that disconcerts advocates of the old serialist dogma to such a degree that they would jealously guard the old narrative, however distortive or anachronistic. Morgan in fact asserts that:

Many gifted figures, some of whom might be of equal or even greater importance if viewed from a different perspective, have been omitted, touched upon only briefly, or included in several geographically organized chapters devoted to composers primarily active outside the central European area. (p. xiv)

27. Arnold Schoenberg, “Schoenberg’s Tone-Row,” (1936), in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), 214.

Second, by reasserting the priority of serialism and other technocratic approaches, Morgan's book may be a subtle exercise in epigonal revisionism, in which pluralism and other "politically correct" codewords are seemingly embraced only to be undermined through patterns of omission and value judgement.

For a history to stake a legitimate claim to contemporaneity, it must first of all identify and acknowledge the historical importance of styles which hitherto have been downplayed to fit the prescriptive notions of techno-essentialism. Scholars must be willing to develop an approach in which, without substituting an alternative essentialism, the various strands of music history can coexist in a more accurate approximation of their actual significance. The contingency of the conventional narrative must be confronted before it can be overcome.

In order not to perpetuate the increasingly anachronistic shape of Morgan's account, musicologists also need to examine the mechanisms that drive the "functional" canon. Debates concerning the inclusion or exclusion of nonwestern texts, works by women, alternative methodologies, and "popular" genres which have flared up in recent years in the fields of art history and literary criticism have scarcely been noticed in music research. Explicitly sociological or economic aspects of the musical experience, even the idea of a musical work as a cultural artifact, continue to be treated as primarily "ethnomusicological" or "anthropological" concerns, irrelevant for "mainstream" musicologists, who continue to define their task in terms of paleography and conservation. Assuming the traditions behind the canon to be ineluctable, some musicologists have even argued that these tasks are the only ones available to responsible scholars.²⁸

With nonwestern, nonconcert styles effectively off-limits for most musicologists, the debate about canons centers on the domain of western "art" music. Even within these confines, though, the functional musicological canon—as determined by what attracts and sustains wide scholarly support—operates

differently from its analogs in art-historical and literary studies. For what falls outside it is simply not studied, and when studied, not encouraged. The criteria which determine the functional canon are at best arbitrary. Many repertoires whose historical importance is widely acknowledged in textbooks and concert programs are nevertheless deemed incapable of sustaining scholarly interest, simply because they either cannot be reconciled with the organicist ideals of the German tradition or because they belong to a tradition brusquely dismissed as irrelevant or inferior by later commentators. The crude reality is that, whereas no one would doubt the significance of a Poulenc or a Dvorák, it would be difficult to muster wide scholarly enthusiasm for a monograph on either one, far less a sustained aesthetic criticism of the *Dialogues of the Carmelites* or *Rusalka*. Composers who enjoy prominence in the concert hall, such as Sibelius, Bruckner, Tchaikovsky, and Shostakovich, have virtually no individual profiles within the academy, though no basic music history course would fail to drop their names. Rossini and Donizetti have achieved a certain respect among specialists, but almost nowhere else.²⁹

This narrow conception of canon is a legacy of the polemics of earlier generations of music criticism, from the Hanslick-

28. Margaret Bent, in her keynote address at the 1985 joint AMS/SEM/SMT meeting in Vancouver, argued heatedly that the only suitable goal of music criticism is "reconstruction, not deconstruction." More specifically, she argued that the critical faculty of the scholar is best employed in the preparation of editions; aesthetic criticism of a higher order is not only presumptuous but belongs in another field altogether, since conjecture of a critical nature defies the positivistic verifiability that, in her view, is the *sine qua non* of responsible scholarship. Her speech was a direct response to Joseph Kerman's then-recent call for musicologists to broaden their aesthetic-critical horizons by learning from the example of art and literary criticism. While the field has changed considerably in the intervening years, it is perhaps premature to assert that her sentiments are no longer widely held.

29. Eloquent testimony to this condition is the absence of any papers to mark either the Rossini bicentennial or the Milhaud or Honegger centennials at the 1992 conference of the American Musicological Society.

Wagner controversy onwards. Schenker, whose work has had the greatest impact on the American theory establishment, epitomized the essentialist view. While his Teutonic bias and his extremely restricted canon is offensive to many, the idea that there can only be a small handful of objects worthy of study tacitly preserves and enshrines the aesthetic priorities of turn-of-the-century German music, even among its critics.

This enshrinement is dramatically reflected in the linear and dialectical models of technical innovation and evolution that monopolize the historiography of twentieth-century music. Even the so-called “progressive” discourses of recent years appropriated from literary criticism—postmodernism and deconstruction, narrative theory, gender construction—at times appear to serve as smokescreens, obscuring ideas long familiar. Susan McClary’s landmark *Feminine Endings*, for example, cannot resist the appeal of engaging Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, and her models for “feminine” musical discourse are nourished by the same Marxian stereotypes of sonata form she wants to reject; while her treatment of these issues is provocative, there is an over-familiar, stale quality in her materials. The same, limited repertoire continues to be discussed; the same, entrenched notions of *Formenlehre* continue to supplant stylistic individuality. Attempts to form alternative canons tend to adopt the same exclusionary principles, preferring alternative essentialisms to the open forum. While work by scholars like McClary at least admits the possibility of new forms of discourse, efforts to represent Schenkerian approaches as “deconstructionist” or postmodern and the epidemic of philosophical and aesthetic name-dropping in projects that offer little substantive revision of established ideas seem underhanded.³⁰

30. Especially in SMT papers and sessions (cf. Gary Don, “Schenker’s Sociology of Tones,” [Oakland, 1991]) and in recent attempts to articulate narrative strategies in music, such as the use of Barthes in Vera Micznik’s “Intertext vs. Narrative in Mahler’s Music,” (Baltimore, 1988). For a positive counterexample, see the Wagner chapters from Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices* (Princeton, 1991).

The idea that the functional canon should actually be smaller than the number of styles usually acknowledged in history surveys is an anomaly that sets musicology apart from the other humanities. While the small size of the field and conventional restrictions on methodology partly explain this situation, the blatant disregard of first-rank and near-first-rank works and figures that fail to mesh with dominant historical and aesthetic models, the coolness of the field toward investigating social or economic aspects of musical production, toward issues of reception history, and toward the role of music within broader intellectual and cultural contexts are alarming shortcomings.

It seems, therefore, overly hasty to declare war on "conventional" historiography as some scholars (including McClary) have done, when the work of cultural history itself has scarcely been practiced on a level worthy of the name. In literature, the interests of gender studies, multiculturalism, and deconstruction can claim legitimacy because their arguments, rooted in a deep acquaintance with canonical and uncanonical literature, have engaged mainstream arguments that are equally deeply grounded. For all their supposedly pernicious³¹ iconoclasm, critics like Barthes, Harold Bloom, Foucault, de Man, and Derrida not only draw upon a broad acquaintance with the literary repertory (broader, it may be presumed, than that of most of the musicologists who eagerly pillage their methodological systems), but abound in insights that spring from the immanent concerns of specific artworks, many of which stand outside the trodden path of the mainstream canon.³² By taking inspiration from the structure of these critics' arguments while

31. Only for neoconservative critics, who are threatened not so much by the supposed immorality of the specific writings of literary critics as by the simple fact that literary critics engage in the criticism, rather than the autocratic validation, of prepackaged masterworks.

32. Michel Foucault's appreciation of Raymond Roussel, *Death and the Labyrinth* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986) comes to mind, as do Bakhtin's landmark studies of Dostoevsky and Rabelais.

ignoring their basis in specific literary experience, transplantations of these methodologies by musicologists and theorists bypass the chance to establish a separate legitimacy on the basis of specific experience with musical repertoires. Stated another way, musicologists will be incapable of producing critical models that are interesting to scholars in other disciplines (or to themselves) as long as they ignore the models that can be developed from the relationship of various repertoires to their surrounding culture, deeply grounded models that are completely covalent neither with lit-crit modes of analysis nor with the usual, narrow patterns of thinking about canons to which music theorists are accustomed.

As a discipline, critical musicology is no longer in its infancy. Scholars can now face without flinching the realities of gender construction, the cultural significance of popular music, and the economic bases of musical activities. However, unless musicologists show an equal willingness to broaden the base of the canon and engage the canon itself in more humanistic terms, the mad rush to embrace the slogans of trend-setting scholars in other branches of the humanities will seem at best premature. Instead of guiding music historiography into adulthood, it risks defrocking it as an awkward and pretentious adolescent. "Alternative" responses to a hollow core risk being themselves hollow and insignificant.

In its passing adumbration of multiculturalism and alternative modes of discourse, Morgan's book raises these issues only to end up flouting them. Lest this fact go unremarked by the vast majority of students and teachers who will use the book, serious attention needs to be paid not just to the cultural assumptions we bring to contemplation of accepted masterworks but to the heavily conditioned cultural dynamics that led us to embrace these particular works in the first place. In the case of twentieth-century music, at least, the choice of masterworks is still open to discussion.