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MARTIN SCHERZINGER

## THE 'NEW POETICS' OF MUSICAL INFLUENCE: A RESPONSE TO KEVIN KORSYN

In his article 'Towards a New Poetics of Musical Influence' (Korsyn 1991), Kevin Korsyn proposes a model for music analysis which attempts to integrate history, psychology, theory and criticism into its methodology. Korsyn appropriates some of the work of literary theorist Harold Bloom, normally associated with the Yale School of Deconstruction, in providing a model for mapping musical influence. By emphasising the relational character of musical works, Korsyn explores a solution to the possible

impasse for music theory afforded by a strictly deconstructive reading, without lapsing into the formalism implied by the determination of the musical work as autonomous or self-contained. Challenging the 'formalism' of music analysis has been the topic of much debate in recent music theory. Alan Street, in his article 'Superior Myths, Dogmatic Allegories: The Resistance to Musical Unity' (Street 1989), based explicitly on the deconstructive method of Paul de Man, goes so far as to hint at a methodological impasse. Korsyn's article, understood in the editor's introduction as a complement, and a 'solution', to Street's assertions, invokes Bloom – de Man's colleague at Yale – to launch his new model. Implicit to the argument, then, is a historically and geographically specific use of deconstruction. This usage informs many of the terms of the debate.

Korsyn's article aims to provide critical paradigms for a theory of intertextuality, thereby furnishing Musicology with a corrective not only to the problematics of musical influence in Music History but also to the wholly immanent analytic concerns ('formalism') apparently characterising Music Theory. One of the functions of the new theory is to allow such methodological divisions to merge. My article will outline, firstly, certain aspects of Bloom's model as it has been understood by Korsyn, and, secondly, Korsyn's application of the model to music. The concluding remarks will assess the model solely in terms of certain internal contradictions which seem to articulate some of its ideological limits, rather than in terms of its potential for the practice of music analysis *per se*.

According to Korsyn, recent attempts to discuss the notion of 'influence' in music have failed to appreciate the historical and conceptual significance of intertextuality. By concentrating on such matters as compositional modelling, citations and borrowings from one composer to another, these studies project a concept of influence as a passive reception of concrete phenomena, without focusing more closely on the mechanisms which mediate this influence. Actively resisting a precursor, for instance, cannot be accounted for in these studies. Thus arises the need for paradigms. Korsyn invokes Bloom for this purpose. In *The Anxiety of Influence* Bloom proposes that poetic influence provides the central data for poetic history. Strong poets clear imaginative space for themselves by *misreading* other poems. Thus the subject matter of poetry can be traced through the poetry of precursors.

Since the post-structuralist condition insists that the immediacy between language and experience has been shattered, experience presenting itself as always already structured by textuality, the poet is confronted with a sense of belatedness. Negotiating a poetic position in the realm of what Ricoeur calls the 'already expressed', the poet seeks to repress and exclude other poems in an Oedipal struggle against his or her forbears. Influence, therefore, must be conceived as discontinuous or 'antithetical', instead of as mimetic. Since a poem can only be read as a

rendezvous of other poems – its subject matter is constituted precisely by the repressed relations between other texts – history is inevitably recalled into the analytic sphere. ‘Rewriting’ replaces ‘writing’, ‘intertext’ replaces ‘text’ and ‘misreading’ replaces ‘reading’ in this theoretical formulation. Since the meaning of a poem is structured by relations between texts instead of within texts, intertextuality becomes central to the poem’s identity, and so too should intertextuality become central to the study of criticism. Korsyn, in paraphrasing Bloom, proclaims that the ‘... anxiety of influence is the true subject matter of ... poetry’ (1991: 7). In this way, a theory is constructed which aligns numerous branches of critical study as methodological imperatives: history constitutes the very possibility of a poem, rather than being added onto it, and thus analysis is compelled to abandon the notion of the self-contained poetic unit.

The poem, as inevitable inscription in previous poems, suggests a structuralist orientation in Bloom’s enterprise, but this is fused with a psychoanalytic reading of mediated revision whereby the ‘strong’ poets transcend their precursors in an anxious confrontation. Although, for Bloom ‘*a*/*ny* poem is an inter-poem, and *any* reading of a poem is an inter-reading’ (quoted :9 – my italics), only strong poets are capable of possessing the freedom of a meaning of their own. This freedom can be attained only by virtue of the plenitude of meaning preceding the poem. Through ‘wounding’ the meanings imposed upon the poet by tradition, the poet becomes strong and enduring. Hence there is an interplay between the ability to misread the past and the formation of the canon. Korsyn states:

Bloom’s theory can provide critical touchstones for explaining canon-formation. His insight into the misprision of the precursors through the revisionary ratios gives us a measure for estimating success or failure in attaining creative strength. (: 34)

Misprision, or mis-taking all anterior texts, is the primary strategy whereby poets become strong. The Kantian notion of genius is thus preserved in the face of an inescapable narrative structure, resulting in the paradoxical formulation of ‘original imitation’ as the primary property of genius. The poet, in a Nietzschean will to power, deploys certain ‘tropological strategies’ (or figures of speech) to misread or (in the language of psychoanalysis) to repress the precursor. These are identified by Bloom as revisionary ratios which signify both a formal mode of reading and a psychic defence against the precursor text.

The seemingly problematic substitution of music for poetry, particularly as it accrues to ‘meaning’, is taken as an opportunity by Korsyn deliberately to misread Bloom, in an analogous misprision, as if the latter were talking about music and not poetry. The transference is justified in the following way. When Bloom identifies the meaning of a poem only in

another poem, this does not mean that both poems can be reduced to a common meaning or a shared substance. Indeed it is precisely the *otherness* of the poem which constitutes its meaning, and even the condition of its possibility. This procedure is likened to the Hegelian notion of self-consciousness, which becomes possible only through an encounter with otherness. Hence, if the meaning of a piece of music is a function of what has been excluded from it, the semantic component may be constituted in an analogous way to that of a poem. Stated differently, meaning figured as absence rather than as reference leads to a closer potential correlation between poetry and music. This level of the argument owes much of its strength to the Derridean notion of the sliding signifier, whereby the sign is no longer made up of the two Saussurian components. Signification is composed of an endless chain of signifiers, and the signified becomes a mere effect of reality. Music, ordinarily understood as lacking a discernible referent, or signified, now bears a striking semiotic correspondence to language. For Korsyn, in mapping the manner in which musical pieces exclude each other by defending themselves against influence, their unique individuality can be measured against their relationship to tradition in a dialectical relation.

Korsyn also identifies Walter Pater as a precursor to Bloom, and cites his dictum that '... all art aspires to the condition of music' as further proof of the suitability of Bloom's theory for music. Since music, in this view, merges the tension between medium and content, thereby eliding the subject (or the matter) with the expression (or the form), an intertextual theory, in which music's subject matter becomes other music, is rendered possible. Elsewhere, Korsyn even suggests that the model may be more suited to music than to poetry, particularly in its ability to direct analysis away from an 'illusory objectivity' (1991: 45). Korsyn seeks to rejuvenate musical studies by offering an analytical method that moves beyond a formal description of structure. Nonetheless, the task remains to harness the revisionary ratios, which are themselves linked to particular tropes, to musical material. This is done by means of a musical example.

Korsyn employs each of the ratios systematically in his analysis of Brahms's *Romanze*, Op. 118, No. 5, which is figured as a misprision of Chopin's *Berceuse*, Op. 57. Brahms, in this account, is shown to be struggling with a number of precursor texts: Chopin's *Berceuse*, the precursors of the *Berceuse* (as mediated thereby) and his own earlier self. Korsyn adds traditional historical details of Brahms's intimate acquaintance with Chopin's music to support this contention. He also traces certain statements made by Brahms to underscore the conscious burden of tradition felt by Brahms. In 1853, when Raff remarked that Brahms's *Scherzo* Op. 4 resembled Chopin's *Scherzo* Op. 31, Brahms declared that he had never encountered Chopin's music, despite the fact that Chopin had been performed consistently in Hamburg throughout the two preceding decades. In a letter to Clara Schumann in 1870 Brahms

stated: 'In everything ... I try my hand at, I tread on the heels of my predecessors, whom I feel in my way' (quoted :15). Elsewhere he complained of the difficulty of overcoming the gigantic influence of Beethoven. Brahms also frequently reshaped his compositions, an activity which suggests the possibility that the anxiety of influence may have extended to his previous self. It is noteworthy, at this point, that Korsyn deploys a traditional survey of historical facts to establish evidence for a theory predicated on a prefigurative conception of language, whereby every 'fact' is characterisable only by the tropological mode in which it is cast. An empirical survey is thus momentarily invoked to ground, as '... a minimal precondition ...' (: 18), a model which is hostile to the possibility of a neutral empiricism. I shall return to this issue later.

There are six 'revisionary ratios' in Bloom's scheme: *Clinamen*, *tessera*, *kenosis*, *daemonization*, *askesis* and *apophrades*. These are employed by Brahms to wrest a meaning of his own by subverting and resisting Chopin's precursor text. Hence they are all connected to a particular psychic defence. *Daemonization*, for instance, is connected to repression, while *askesis* is connected to sublimation. The revisionary ratios are distinguished from the level of conspicuous allusion between the texts, signifying instead a deeper psychic affinity. The middle section of the Romanze overtly appropriates many of the features of the Berceuse, such as the one-bar ostinato, the four-bar theme, the performance indications (including 'piano' and 'dolce') and the avoidance of harmonic and melodic closure at the end of the theme. These connections are overt allusions and thus not constitutive of the deeper misprision at work in the piece. I shall briefly describe Korsyn's employment of two of these revisionary ratios in his analysis of Brahms's Romanze.

Korsyn identifies a literal five-note quotation in the theme of the Romanze, which, he argues, is composed out on a deeper structural level in Chopin's piece. Not only is the motive cited, but this organic expansion is itself appropriated by Brahms and analogously composed out. Schenkerian graphs are employed to illustrate the larger statement of the embedded foreground figure. However, Brahms intensifies the process by using the motive to link theme and variation more intimately. Now the note completing the motive is sounded together with the note beginning the motive in the ensuing variation. This phenomenon is taken by Korsyn to signal the operation of *tessera*, or 'antithetical completion'. *Tessera*, a term borrowed from ancient mystery cults, is connected to the rhetorical trope of synecdoche. In Bloom's terms, it denotes the reading of a precursor which retains the original terms but employs them in another fashion, '... as if the precursor has failed to go far enough' (quoted :26). Korsyn articulates the process thus:

Brahms wants (consciously or unconsciously) to persuade us (and himself) that his discourse is more whole, more complete, than the

'truncated' discourse of his precursor. To do this, he emphasizes the correspondence of part and whole: his motive is a microcosm for the entire theme; since variations, as Schoenberg said, are primarily repetitions, the theme is a microcosm for the whole variation set. (: 27)

Two brief points should be made about the logic of this argument as it stands. Firstly, by having Brahms emphasise the part/whole relationships in the hierarchical reduplication of the motive, Korsyn identifies structural levels as the musical analogue to synecdoche. It follows, then, that foreground features themselves become the 'part' of the background 'whole'. Korsyn states:

Schenker's system ... discloses *both* hierarchical reduplication *and* its opposite, showing both the possibility of a rapport between levels, as when the same motive appears in both the foreground and middleground, and a tension or contradiction between levels, as when a dissonance on one level becomes consonant at the next. (: 27)

Clearly the synecdochial properties under discussion are taken to result from the hierarchical reduplication of motivic features – that is, a correspondence (or non-correspondence) of features on different levels of the same piece. Bloom, however, employs the term strictly intertextually, designating thereby a part/whole relationship between two texts, rather than a hierarchic relationship within a text. If Schenker's intra-textual structural levels are the musical analogue for synecdoche, what has become of the intertextual part/whole relationship underlying *tessera*?

Secondly, Korsyn characterises Chopin's attempt to impose himself on tradition as an attempt to persuade us that the work is '... more whole, more organic [than its predecessors] in its solution to the problems of variation form' (: 27). The selection of an organicist metaphor as constituting the terms of the 'antithetical completion' seems to engage, albeit on a deeper (structural!) level of argument, the formalism it sought to transcend in its initial aims. Do the theoretical implications of intertextuality perhaps suggest a decentring of subject and subject matter more thorough than Korsyn's text is prepared to manage? This question does not necessarily destabilise the model itself, as a methodological construct, highlighting instead only some possible inconsistencies in the logic of the argument. It does provide some clues, however, for an interrogation of the methodology itself. Some of these concerns will be briefly addressed later.

In order to dramatise the difference between a strong and a weak (mis)reading of a precursor text, Korsyn considers another piece, the last of Reger's *Träume am Kamin*, Op. 143, which confronts the Berceuse unsuccessfully. Again, metre, harmony, spacing, phrasing and performance directions are shown to bear a striking affinity with Chopin's piece.

Conspicuous allusions predominate, beginning with an unaccompanied ostinato and followed by an increasingly embellished theme. Even some of the techniques for embellishment, such as descending scale passages leading into trills, are shown to resemble each other. In this way, Reger is equally enmeshed in a struggle with a precursor. Reger, however, is unsuccessful because he fails to '... hear that Chopin's continuity exists in a dialectical tension with his four-bar groups [whereby] continuity arises from *overcoming* the sectional divisions' (: 46). His figurations remain weak and meandering.

Reger's failure is measured against a second Schenkerian diagnosis of Brahms's *Romanze*, which exemplifies metaphorically another revisionary ratio, called *clinamen*. This ratio is linked to the Freudian defence of 'reaction-formation' and represents a misprision through the trope of irony. The precursor's text is exposed as relatively limited and naive through an initial 'swerve' from its expressed vision. It is the negation of this earlier vision that is fastened onto in the misprision. Brahms ironises the *Berceuse* by framing the intertextual variation, which recalls the *Berceuse*, with two sections whose influence is not strictly mapped in the same way. The embedded variation is in D major, while the outer sections are in F major.

Korsyn elaborates on the manner in which the tonality of the middle section is prepared by showing how melody, harmony and rhythm conspire to emphasise a D minor triad as the opening section, in F major, unfolds. When the dominant of this new tonicisation is reached, however, the leading note is lowered, resulting in an A minor triad which leads back to the home key. Only the second time this tonicisation is effected is the modulation to D major accomplished. The same structural events thus engender a different tonal outcome. The middle section, now functioning as a locally stable (but globally unstable) key, produces a temporal experience which is completely different to that of the *Berceuse*. This temporal structuring is achieved through the framing action of *clinamen*.

David B. Greene's ideas of temporality and temporal processes are then used to gauge the significance of the temporal structuring in the *Romanze* against that of the *Berceuse*. Chopin's ostinato figure is characterised as being harmonically 'future oriented' and rhythmically 'past oriented', on account of its unique metric placement. This results in a tension which resembles the temporal structure of the middle section of the *Romanze*. Memory and anticipation are situated in an equilibrium. In Chopin's piece, this balancing of past and future in the ostinato figure evokes a heightened sense of the present which Korsyn in turn identifies with an undivided consciousness.

In contrast, Brahms's text, inevitably mediated by the presence of the *Berceuse*, suggests the impossibility of retrieving the innocence implied by an undivided consciousness. This suggestion is expressed through the deployment of the ironising *clinamen*. As an embedded middle part,



framed by two sections, it assumes (in Korsyn's words) 'more the character of a memory than of an immediate presence' (: 43). Chopin's vision is thus both affirmed and negated by Brahms's misreading. The middle section, taken as an identity in itself, antithetically completes the Berceuse, while, taken in relation to the two other sections, it ironises the Berceuse. The precursor is revised through an original subverting, and, being a strong composer, Brahms stakes his claim on the canon.

Korsyn's application of the intertextual model – the terms he employs for his comparison of Reger with Brahms, his choice of musical examples and his invocation of diverse music theorists – implies a web of commitments which warrant closer inspection. For instance, Reger's misreading of the Berceuse is considered weak because he 'failed to hear' (: 46) a dialectical tension in Chopin's work, a tension in which continuity results from resisting, rather than emphasising, the sectional divisions. Without inscribing this resistance into his composition, Reger's variations are rendered amorphous – 'flaccid, meandering, directionless' (: 46). The point to be made here is neither concerned with the accuracy of these assertions (whether an analogous dialectical tension may not, in fact, inhere in Reger's work), nor is it simply concerned with the ideologically charged terms employed to distinguish the compositions (that is, the unexamined coupling of musical value with the recognition of a dialectical tension). It is concerned rather with the methodological paradox involving the idea of misprision. If all composition is an intertextual *misreading*, how is it possible for Reger to *fail* to hear an aspect of the precursor text? Misreading, in this particular example, seems to involve less the 'antithetical' or 'discontinuous' relation to an earlier work, announced at the outset of the article, than a particular *kind* of continuity in this relation. Failure sufficiently to solicit the 'dialectical tension' of the earlier work (which, by implication, is held to be crucial to its vision, identity, meaning or whatever) amounts to a failure to become strong. Is this a mis-misreading? Why, theoretically speaking, is this failure not figured as a 'forgetting' – the unconscious repression which constitutes *daemonization*, for instance? In fact, the ontological status of the work of art itself is invested precisely in such concealed defences. We can recall that for Bloom '... this sort of concealment *is* poetry' (quoted :12). More importantly, however, what is at stake in the insistence that due attentiveness be paid to certain aspects of the precursor text, while other aspects may be, and perhaps even *should* be (in order to attain strength), ignored?

This conflict of method would not be so disconcerting if the above-mentioned relations of discontinuity, difference and antithesis between texts were not considered a methodological advancement over the '... [passive] transmission of discursive ideas' which, for Korsyn, characterises traditional source study (: 7). As a result, Korsyn's project seems to replicate the very methodological structuring it seeks to transcend. The harnessing of empirical data, then, to support the

attribution of an 'anxiety of influence' to Brahms, discussed above, counts less as historical proof than as a symptom of a divided methodological posturing. In this regard, the choice of music examples in Korsyn's article is analogously symptomatic. Although *any* composition is said to be an intertext, only those works that can be shown to yield to a traditional historical and/or empirical test for similarity and influence are actually employed. The respective affinities between Chopin's Scherzo Op. 31 and Brahms's Scherzo Op. 4, Chopin's Etude Op. 25, No. 2 and Brahms's creative transcription thereof, and the Berceuse and the Romanze are all evident on the level, first, of 'conspicuous allusion'. If intertextuality inevitably informs, or even constitutes the possibility of, a composition, why are the chosen examples equally responsive to a traditional reading?

Lastly, the manner in which Korsyn gathers an array of diverse theorists to cohere around a central nexus of theoretical ideas in his article deserves some comment. To take only the deployment of David Greene and Heinrich Schenker in the revisionary ratios discussed above, a certain pattern of argument creating a 'syllogistic' effect can be noted. In Korsyn's discussion of *tessera*, the Romanze is shown to exhibit a 'deeper relationship' (: 22) to the Berceuse by virtue of its composing out of a quoted five-note motive. Schenkerian graphs of the two pieces are used to illustrate how Brahms both iterates Chopin, in an analogous organic expansion of the motive, and then transcends him ('as if [he] has failed to go far enough'), by employing the motive to link theme and variation in an additional, more intimate way. Again, the point here does not revolve around the validity of the analytic finding *per se*, but rather around the terms employed to sustain the argument. The logic of 'affinity' is mediated through another analytical construct, namely a Schenkerian graph, and then identified as a revisionary *tessera*. Intertextual resonances depicted in these pieces seem to extend beyond the texts of Brahms and Chopin to include those of Schenker.

Perhaps it is implied that these organic expansions may be intuited, even unconsciously, by the composers concerned, and that the graphs are simply used to provide an explication of these unconscious workings. Throughout the article, Korsyn frequently asserts that the misprision is unconscious. Freud's Oedipal model is employed for exactly this purpose. The point is underscored further when Korsyn cites Bloom as stating that the poet may not even be familiar with the text he is misreading. But leaving aside, yet again, the question of the accuracy of such an implication, we can observe that at least part of the meaning of a text – in this case the composing out of the five-note motive – is taken simply to inhere in the text itself. This momentary construction of musical meaning as immanent cannot be sustained in the terms of a thoroughly intertextual understanding of musical meaning, which is articulated as methodologically axiomatic at the outset of the article. Bloom repeatedly asserts this concern: 'There is no unmediated vision, but only mediated

revision'; '[w]e need to stop thinking of any poet as an autonomous ego. . . . Every poet is a being caught up in a dialectical relationship . . . with another poet or poets'; '[a]ny poem is an inter-poem, and any reading of a poem is an inter-reading' (quoted :8, :9, :9). The latter part of this last quotation is significant because it highlights the analogous, unavoidable intertextuality implied in any reading of a poem by the critic/analyst.

Korsyn acknowledges as much when he dismisses David Lewin's reading of Bloom as 'weak' or when he states: 'I am the first [musician] to realize that [Bloom's] internalization of subject matter brings music and poetry closer together, allowing a fuller musical appropriation of Bloom than has previously been attempted' (: 12-13). Perhaps the clearest acknowledgement of this intertextual web, as operative for the critic as much as for the composer, resides in the question posed by Korsyn before embarking on his analysis (a question which poignantly suggests that the usurpation of Bloom is both valid and appropriate): 'Can we perform the same kind of deliberate misreading *on Bloom*, reading him as if he were talking about *music* instead of *poetry*?' (: 12). Again, it must be stressed that given the fact that not only musical meaning is said to be constructed intertextually but music's very ontological status is identified as quintessentially intertextual – a view borne out by the above quotations – this invocation of immanence, however fleeting, cannot be theoretically accommodated by the model.

I have argued that the intertextual link identified between the two musical works in Korsyn's working example is arbitrated by a Schenkerian notion of foreground expansion. In this way, the critic too remains captive to a linguistic mode, or 'precursor text', which seeks to grasp the outline of the objects in its field of perception. One is tempted to ask how these objects (in this instance identified as tracing the very acts of misprision) may be accessed at all without such recourse to another text. But this would lead to a more ideologically motivated critique of the model than I am prepared to advance. For the moment, I wish to comment from a position that remains strictly within the terms of the argument.

The following questions remain. As a theory of poetic influence, how can Korsyn's analytic findings be conceived of as being grounded in an intertextual model, rather than in a purely Schenkerian one, when the latter is the means by which the former is articulated? The overtly intra-textual nature of Schenkerian analysis does little to moderate this methodological reticulation. Also, bearing in mind the clear division between strong and weak misreadings of precursors, is it not ultimately the Schenkerian criteria (convincing though they may be), instead of the revisionary ratios, that become the yardstick against which the judgement of value is gauged? If this is the case, the model may be lending the analytic formalism it aims to eschew a new lease of life. The potential scandal of post-structuralism is thereby possibly contained and reduced to a technical armoury, unshackled by history, in service of the enduring object.

'Intertext' is reconstituted as 'text'.

The deployment of Greene's ideas about temporal structures and processes can be shown to function rhetorically in the same way. Korsyn's purpose, however, in outlining the respective temporalities of the two pieces is not as clear. His argument proceeds in the following way:

- 1) The tonality of the entire middle section of the Romanze, as both locally stable and globally unstable, has a dual function. This tension gives rise to a particular temporal experience.
- 2) The ostinato figure of the Berceuse, being rhythmically closed and harmonically open, also contributes to this unique temporal structure.
- 3) The state of consciousness evoked by this tension in the Berceuse is that of an undivided, child-like consciousness.
- 4) The state of consciousness evoked in the Romanze is that of a memory, suggesting that a return to this innocence is irretrievable.

Points 1) and 2) suggest a temporal *affinity* between the two pieces based on an analogous tension. By implication, Brahms's variation intensifies the temporal structure of his precursor, insofar as the tension in it governs the entire section and not simply the ostinato figure. Point 3) links this tension to a unified consciousness, but point 4) links the (analogous) tension to a completely different state of consciousness, which ironises the first. The irony (*clinamen*) is constituted by the framing of the variations by two other sections, and thus a temporal *difference* is suggested. The order in which these points are presented is revealing. A particular temporal structure in the Romanze is thus differentiated from the same temporal structure in the Berceuse at one level of the argument, and affined to it at another. If it is the framing action alone that constitutes the ironising *clinamen*, why is its temporal affinity emphasised at the outset?

Perhaps this observation should not be overstated, allowing instead that the implied affinity is simply gratuitous rather than damaging to the argument as a whole. However, Reger is marginalised precisely for failing temporally to affine the last of his *Träume am Kamin* to the Berceuse. Differentiating between the strong and the weak is not as simple as this logic would imply. Unlike Bloom, who undertakes to write a revisionary history of Romantic poetry, staking out a line (from Spencer, through Milton, to Blake and Shelley and including such moderns as Lawrence and Yeats) which is radically opposed to that proposed by Eliot and the New Critics, Korsyn (in what is perhaps another attempt to gain a traditional credibility for the model) simply perpetuates the traditional division between these composers. Throughout Korsyn's text, and in various ways, then, the logic of affinity is interwoven with that of difference in a precarious montage.

One final point about the strong/weak designation. In order to illustrate how a work becomes strong in the presence of a precursor text, it must be shown to overcome and transcend the earlier text. But what aspects of the text must it overcome? Korsyn interprets these aspects as 'problems', in

this case the problem of variations.

How can one overcome the sectional divisions of this form? A variation theme generally inscribes an independent circle of meaning, resembling an autonomous composition with complete melodic and harmonic closure. Hence variation movements, as they reproduce the structure of the theme, may disintegrate into separate sections. . . . The problem, then, is how to give the sequence of variations some compelling logic and unity. (: 21)

Apart from the formalism inherent in the apparent search for 'logic and unity', this 'problem' is *assumed* of history. Not only is there no unmediated reason why Brahms's 'solution' is any more 'imaginative', or more strictly 'unified', than Reger's – this would involve a different set of negotiating parameters – but the 'problem' is a fictional construct inserted into the reading. Rather than activating the historical time which the analysis aims to include, Korsyn's strategy suggests a mythic time playing out a great mythic drama.

It would be interesting to plot, through the inner workings of Korsyn's text, the very tropes that are projected onto its 'historical' narrative. Korsyn's intertextuality may be construed as an attempt to overcome the sectional, 'episodic' history that is implied by a strictly formalist reading of a musical work in order to unify it into a more compelling historical whole. It is precisely *this* writing of history, pervasively beholden to notions of unity, coherence and realism, that renders Korsyn's 'poetics' rather more old than new.

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