Editorial, Music Analysis, 22/i-ii (2003), Jonathan Cross, ed.

Joseph Kerman's notorious and provocatively titled article, *`How We Got Into Analysis, and How to Get Out'*, first published in 1980, fired the starting pistol on a debate that has raged ever since. Central to his argument were questions concerning the importance of organicism and unity in music. As Robert Morgan reminds us in this double issue, Kerman regarded organicism as nothing less than the `ruling ideology' that governed musical analysis in theory and practice. `From the standpoint of the ruling ideology, analysis exists for the purpose of demonstrating organicism, and organicism exists for the purpose of validating a certain body of works of art'. And it takes no great leap of the imagination to complete the circle: an organically unified work of art exists for the purpose of validating both the analysis and the analyst.

Thus, the Schenkerian and Schoenbergian traditions, committed, as Webern put it, to the demonstration of the `utmost relatedness between all component parts', dominated analytical production and pedagogy for many decades. (It is worth noting that, in the years following the Second World War, this paralleled what was happening in composition: the Webern-inspired experiments in integral serialism of the likes of Boulez and Babbitt, attempting to generate every dimension of a work from one initial `idea', were perhaps another manifestation of the `ruling ideology'. Of course, Boulez and Babbitt also became highly influential figures in the world of music analysis.) Thus, not only the tonal canon from Bach to Brahms (`a certain body of works of art'), but also early music, twentieth-century music (apparently cacophonous but it's actually better than you think because, deep down, it can be shown to be unified just like the much-loved masterworks from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), even popular music, were subject to close examination by means of, inter alia, the Schenkerian microscope. Only music that was unified was worth analysing (`masterworks') and only analysts that could perform this task were worth taking seriously. Theorists proved their credentials and secured their tenure by demonstrating unity. There was plenty of evidence, then, to confirm Kerman's claim: here was the ruling ideology at work.

An analysis concerned only with demonstrating organic unity was a closed system, ultimately self-supporting and self-justifying. It allowed no space for `other things', for other kinds of musical meaning. But these `other things', we now prefer to think, are crucial: a work of art does not just exist to justify itself; it participates in social and cultural formation, defining and defined by such matters as gender, race and sexuality.

[…]

...and yet, despite the much-documented death of the autonomous artwork, focused text-based analysis still continues in classrooms around the world. We teach our students to understand harmony and counterpoint, form and structure, to read and write voice-leading graphs, because we believe such matters to be part of a rounded musical education, and because we believe they offer important (if partial) insights into the music. And we do such things ourselves in private, too, because — let's admit it — they give us pleasure. To discover for ourselves in a familiar piece a hidden motivic repetition or a subtle recomposition of an earlier harmonic progression is immensely satisfying, and enables us to hear the music in fresh and rewarding ways. Close contact with music is how most of us got into analysis, and I suspect it is such close contact (whether through performance, composition, listening or, yes, analysis) that sustains us.

[…]

In the end, what really matters is not the adherence to particular theoretical orthodoxies but whether we actually have anything useful to say about the music and its contexts, and hence about the way in which we see the world, about the kinds of realities we construct for ourselves, and the manner in which music participates in those processes. Analysis, like art, is profoundly human. It only works well if it can help us see ourselves and those around us in an ever- changing light. Perhaps this is what Jim Samson was getting at when, in his important essay on `Analysis in Context', he wrote that `the old formalism, no less than the New Musicology, may take its impetus from pleasure and intensity, and may in turn create that surplus of both which enables the best (the ``highest'') criticism.' What more can one ask of analysis?