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Making Sense of the Non-sensible

Unity in Five Articles on Beethoven's Op. 132 (1987–2009)

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Abstract

The aim of the present study was to explore how the concept of unity has been addressed in five musicological or music-theoretical articles on Beethoven's Op. 132, first movement, published between 1987 and 2009. The five articles or book chapters analysed were written by Kofi Agawu (1987/1991), Robin Wallace (1989), Daniel Chua (1995), Susan McClary (2000) and Frank Samarotto (2009). All texts were representative of different analytical traditions. The texts were analysed in their own methodological context, but juxtaposed under four rubrics: unity of surface, unity of form, unity of subsurface and motivic unity. The results showed that even if the five writers considered the work disunified on one level, they discovered unity on another. If the surface was seen as irrational, the subsurface level granted relative coherence. If theoretical constructs on the subsurface level were seen as disruptive and incomplete, their alleged familiarity served to guarantee perceptual significance. And if the form was seen as ambiguous, identifying certain formal blocks and labels was considered to be of secondary importance. Of primary importance was that process itself had been thrown into confusion. Morgan's (2003) call for an analysis showing that the disunity itself is meaningful was answered by Wallace who suggested Beethoven's composition is deliberately ambiguous.

Keywords

Unity, Analysis, Beethoven, Opus 132, Music theory, Musicology

Other Information

Acknowledgments

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1. Introduction

Unity has for long been an important concept within the fields of musicology and music theory. Richard Cohn and Douglas Dempster state that the principal and most persistent canon (in the sense of law or rule) governing our Western aesthetic is that 'successful works of art, including the "masterpieces" of Western art music, exhibit unity, coherence, or "organic" integrity' (Cohn and Dempster 1992, 156). Fred Everett Maus equally notes that '[u]nity is a familiar criterion of value for individual musical compositions, especially for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European instrumental music and related twentieth-century traditions' (Maus 1999, 171). However, as Maus notes, recent discussions suggest that the content and status of this criterion may be unclear. 'Perhaps we do not always know what we mean by "musical unity"; perhaps unity (whatever it is) is not as important or as central as we have sometimes believed,' Maus writes (ibid.).

What is musical unity? Maus (ibid., 184) lists a variety of words and expressions associated with musical unity: 'coherence', 'completeness', 'comprehensiveness', 'fusion', 'integrity', 'integration', 'logic', 'organic unity', 'perfection', 'self-sufficiency', 'synthesis', 'totality', 'wholeness'. While some of these seem to be species of unity ('coherence', 'fusion', 'wholeness'), others do not ('logic', 'self-sufficiency') (ibid.). However, the relation to unity is, according to Maus, clear in the latter cases as well. He writes: 'when a sequence of musical events is called logical, the point is that the events *go together* in a certain way; an ascription of self-sufficiency suggests a unified whole that is separated from some exterior' (ibid.).

Likewise, Robert P. Morgan (2003) suggests that unity should not be seen as an all-encompassing idea, but rather as an approach where disparate musical elements work towards a common and coherent goal. Morgan writes on musical unity:

> It is not the sort of absolute unity proposed by certain idealistic philosophers, such as F. S. Bradley, according to whom everything is seamlessly integrated into the One, thus negating all relationships. Nor is it of the sort represented by Aristotelian unities of time, place and action. Rather, the unity asserted by music analysts acknowledges

the coexistence of distinct and contrasting elements, but finds that, however differentiated these may be, they work together to produce a common and coherent goal. (Morgan 2003, 21–22.)

Morgan further contends that belief in such coherence obviously shapes the analyst's perspective; but most analysts would argue that there are aspects of the music that render their search for unity appropriate:

When the analysts … state that a certain musical event, or formal segment, lacks unity, they are in essence claiming that some aspect of the work is lacking in coherence. Under certain circumstances that may be justified, and even analytically supportable; but it does not seem to be what propels [some] analysts … They do not fault the piece but the way we understand it. (Morgan 2003, 22.)

Equally, Maus (1999, 179) seriously questions that claims about musical unity should appear simply as assertions about compositions, without showing the relation of the alleged compositional unity to musical experiences. Instead, he suggests three other bearers of musical unity. First, there is the unity of a listening experience (ibid.). Second, there is the idea that unity belongs to a world, in the sense that listening to a successful piece of instrumental music gives one access to a particular world, which can be visited, explored, perhaps inhabited, perhaps just contemplated (ibid., 181). And third, Maus suggests that unity can belong to a story somehow communicated by the music (ibid., 182).

Although an important aesthetic criterion—or precisely for that reason—unity has also been seriously questioned as a musical value. For some of the fiercest attacks on unity in modern musicology, see Kerman (1980; 1985) and Street (1989). Morgan (2003, 22) identifies a certain 'negative attitude towards unity' in contemporary musical scholarship, which he ascribes to a 'comprehensive recent epistemological transformation that has influenced attitudes about truth and knowledge' (ibid.). Particularly, he argues, certain 'postmodernist' ideas have come to influence contemporary musical scholarship. Among these is the idea that all language is necessarily metaphorical:

Like all discourse, musical analysis cannot escape language's open-ended universe of plural meanings. Works of art are not simply there ('present') as independent objects, but are in constant transformation, linked to the shifting cultural and historical conditions that shape them and our understanding of them. … Unity no longer resides in the composition but is subjectively posited solely by the analyst, with no more value than any other judgement. A focus on unity, moreover, exaggerates the integrity of the whole, making us blind to inconsistencies and discontinuities that would emerge under less restrictive interpretative rubrics. (Morgan 2003, 22–23.)

Morgan notes that suspicion towards unity in the arts has a long history, dating back at least to Friedrich Schlegel and other early romantics (ibid.). The difference, however, between these earlier and current trends is that the earlier ones did not stress disunity to the same extent as the present-day (ibid.). Today, Maus, among others, claims that 'if analysis can display musical unity, then it must also have the capacity to display disunity. … If one can assert, for instance, that two passages present motivically related material, then, by the same criterion of relatedness, it should be meaningful to assert that a third passage lacks that motivic feature.' (Maus 1999, 171.) Morgan theorises on the relation between analysis and (dis)unity:

Analysis is based on the assumption that music 'makes sense', without which it makes no sense itself as a discipline. Its purpose is thus to show how music makes sense or, more rarely, how it fails to make sense. In the case of music that is 'intentionally' disunified, then, it tries to show that the disunity is itself meaningful— that is, connects with and supports other matters. What seems disunified at one level turns out to be unified at another. Simply to claim that a composition lacks unity, however, is only to say that it fails, leaving it indistinguishable from any others that fail. … Put differently, the mere claim that a composition lacks unity necessarily silences the analyst. (Morgan 2003, 27.)

Essentially, Morgan calls for an underlying logic justifying the incoherencies, and for an analysis vital enough to show these connections. In the case of music that is 'intentionally' disunified, music analysis ought to show how the disunity is itself meaningful. And if there is no logic to be discerned, then it makes no sense to engage with analysis (which tries to make sense out of music).

Aim of the study

The aim of the present study is to explore how unity has been perceived and comprehended in five Anglo-American musicological or music-theoretical writings on Beethoven's Op. 132, first movement, published between 1987 and 2009. That is, to explore how the musical work has been seen on a unity–disunity axis and how unity has been understood in the musical work. The focus of this essay is, first and foremost, texts on the music rather than the music itself.

The writers, whose texts are treated in the present study, are, in chronological order, Kofi V. Agawu (1987/1991), Robin Wallace (1989), Daniel Chua (1995), Susan McClary (2000), and Frank Samarotto (2009). Agawu's study of the first movement of Op. 132 first appeared in 1987 as an article (Agawu 1987), and four years later as a book chapter in *Playing with signs* (Agawu 1991). Being for the most part a critique of Agawu and McClary, Robert S. Hatten's (2004) comments on Op. 132 will be treated only briefly. Michael Spitzer's (2006) study of Beethoven's late style including his discussion on Op. 132 will be referred to only occasionally. While Spitzer's book is useful for explicating Adorno's fragmentary comments on the strategic moments of Beethoven's Op. 132, his theory of Beethoven's late style does not bring anything original to the discussion as regards the unity of the work. Other writings could be treated as well. However, for instance, Greg Vitercik's (1993) article on structure and expression in Beethoven's Op. 132 has not been included as it is essentially a reply to Wallace (1989). Likewise, Sylvia Imeson's (1996) study on paradox in late Beethoven has been excluded as it relates only implicitly to the subject. My discussion of unity is confined to unity as it appears in the texts of Agawu (1991), Wallace (1989), Chua (1995), McClary (2000) and Samarotto (2009). Apart from those texts, I will not be dealing with the vast unity debate that raged in recent years. Nor will I deal with concepts of unity of Beethoven's contemporaries.

All five texts appear in different contexts. Wallace's (1989) discussion of Beethoven's Op. 132 appears in an article on the music's expressive dimensions. As a test case, he suggests that in Op. 132, 'deliberate ambiguity, which is an expression of music's potential for diversity rather than organic coherence, is an essential part of the work's emotional content, and hence of its "message"' (Wallace 1989, 5). Agawu's (1991)

study of Op. 132 is part of a larger discussion of the interplay between domains in Viennese Classic music in general. Agawu is especially interested in instances where the events in the different domains do not coincide. Daniel Chua (1995, 6) talks of his book as 'a translation of Adorno's philosophy of music into actual analysis.' He attempts to bridge the gap between the 'sheer inadequacy of traditional theory and the works themselves' (ibid.). Furthermore, he argues that, in Op. 132, there are 'processes at work which cause an entire piece to unfold with a logic that creates the peculiarities of the score' (ibid., 5). This is called a 'structured disruption', an analytical paradox; the very logic that analysis tries to uncover is also the cause of the illogicalities in the work: 'The music forces analysis away from the hallowed concept of unity towards paradox, ambiguity, and disconnection,' Chua argues (ibid.). McClary's (2000) presentation of Op. 132 appears in a collection of lectures, where she seeks to explore the social premises and cultural context of Op. 132 through conventions. Finally, Samarotto's (2009) text on Beethoven's Op. 132 appears in a collection of essays presenting nine different writers' perspectives on sonata forms. Consequently, Samarotto's study is largely concerned with the 'notoriously idiosyncratic distortion of sonata form' (ibid., 1) as well as issues of tonality and temporality. Thus, in the present study, unity and disunity will mainly be discussed in terms of form, motives, topical significance, emotional content, voice-leading and harmony, but less in terms of expression, gestures, narratives and dramaturgy.

Likewise, all five writers represent different scholarly traditions. Schenkerian methodology is a common denominator, but all writers mix Schenkerian analysis with other methods: McClary is connected with new musicology and literary theory, Samarotto is engaged with aspects of temporal and formal analysis, Wallace with issues of expression, Agawu with semiotic interpretation and Chua with his own home-made hotchpotch of Schenkerian and other analytical methods. Because the writers concerned represent a variety of scholarly traditions and because they do not always define their views on unity/disunity overtly, the writers' views will be presented in their own context, thematically organised under four rubrics: unity of surface, unity of form, unity of subsurface and motivic unity. The chapter on motivic unity will be devoted entirely to Daniel Chua's (1995) view, for reasons that will be explicated in that chapter. I will spare the reader my own comments until the discussion in Chapter 6, where I will do a more thorough comparison between the

different views. The findings will be related to Maus's attributes of unity presented at the beginning of this chapter, and Morgan's call for appropriate forms of analysis.

2. Unity of surface

In this chapter, I will present arguments regarding the unity of the surface in the first movement of Op. 132. I will concentrate on the views presented by Kofi Agawu (1991) and Susan McClary (2000), who explore unity on the surface level through topical signification, contrast, surface continuity, and issues of meaning. For Agawu, this means identifying and listing topics, whereas McClary is concerned with arguments regarding the shattered subjectivity communicated in the music. My focus will be on the first 48 bars of the movement. To begin with, I will examine Agawu's take on contrast as an aesthetic premise for Beethoven's late quartets.

Agawu's view

For Agawu, perhaps the most striking characteristic of the first movement of Op. 132 is the 'extreme contrast that dominates the musical surface' (1991, 112). According to Agawu, contrast is a common characteristic of many of Beethoven's late quartets, whether it is a contrast between movements or within a single movement, as in the case of the first movement of Op. 132. Agawu also quotes Walter Riezler's characterisation of the condition of contrast, where Riezler states that '[in the late style,] Beethoven's contrasts … acquired an altogether unparalleled profundity' and that, in the first movement of Op. 132, 'contrasts prevail without interruption' (Riezler 1938, 235, quoted in Agawu 1991, 112). For Agawu, the dual implication of Riezler's insight is, on one hand, 'that contrast be taken as the basic premise for analysis, so that norms are formulated with the premise of discontinuity rather than continuity … and on the other, that the threat to coherence implicit in this condition is ameliorated by the pull of a background structure in which these contrasts are regularized' (ibid., 112). In an attempt to establish the 'phenomenological validity of contrast' (ibid., 113), Agawu offers a description of the many contrasted events that take place on the first page of the score:

> The slow and regular half-note figuration that dominates the first seven and a half
> bars is followed, or rather, interrupted, by a rapid sixteenth-note figure in the first
> violin (measures 9–10). Then, with the emergence of what appears to be a coherent

musical idea or motif (the dotted figure in measure 11, cello), the music seems to be on its way—but only for eight measures, for midway through measure 18 another erratic change occurs, arresting the motion in the manner of measures 9–10, and leading not to a relatively stable passage as before, but to a full Adagio measure on six-four harmony (measure 21), a partial recollection of the effect of the opening measures. This, in turn, gives way in measure 22 to the sixteenth-note idea from measure 9, and then to the dotted figure again in measure 23. On this immediate level of structure, then, there is much change, contrast, and, summarily, instability. Riezler's characterization of this musical surface in terms of "contrasts … without interruption" is shown to be particularly apt. (Agawu 1991, 112–3.)

Agawu later leads us to the identification of topics, the resulting list of which is reproduced as Figure 1. In addition, Agawu, again, offers a verbal description of the events taking place until the appearance of the secondary key area in bar 48, now with spotted topics. Let me quote him at length:

Measures 1–8 suggest learned style by virtue of the strict almost fugal-expository imitation. … The temporal unit is alla breve, and the slow tempo, soft dynamics, and generic thwarting of expectations—what sort of piece is this?—conspire to create a sense of fantasy. The conjunction of learned style and fantasy already encapsulates a conflict, for fantasy implies a lack of order and discipline, whereas learned style implies the strictest possible discipline. Measures 9–10 suggest, in their improvisatory, virtuosic, and unmeasured manner, a cadenza, while the dotted-note idea initiated by the cello in measure 11 is clearly a reference to a march (whose narrow range and sighing effect hint simultaneously at singing style). … We hear hints of the learned style in measures 15–17, while the celebratory triadic outline in measures 18–19 describes a fanfare; in addition, given its disposition within a musical context in which contrast is a premise and such aural flights emerge almost unannounced, we can hear hints of the midcentury sensibility style in measures 19–21. The first violin cadenza returns in measures 21–22, followed by march in measures [sic] 23, from which point it begins to establish itself as the main topic of the movement. A striking, if parenthetical reference to gavotte may be heard in measure 40, and the brief imitation of the head of this dance suggests learned style. We will refer to a gavotte in learned style underpinned by march, a complex from which the listener selects one or two components depending on which line of discourse he or she wishes to follow. Finally, with the arrival of the second key, an

Learned Style	Alla Breve	Fantasy	Cadenza	March	Sensibility	Gavotte	Aria	Brilliant Style
1–8	1–8	1–8	9–10	11+	18–20			
			21–22	23+				
25–28					28–29			
				30+				
40–44						40+		
							48+	
		60+						60+
					67–74			
75–91				75–91				
				92–102				
	103–106							
107+				107+				
			119+					
				121+				
125+								
					129+			
			131–32	134+				
151–54						151+	159+	
		176+						176+
					182+			
	193+			195				212
214–17						214+		
							223+	
				232				236
	247			247+				
				254–64				251+

Figure 1. Topics in Beethoven's String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132, first movement after Agawu (1991, 115).

Italian aria emerges, complete with an introductory vamp and near-heterophonic presentation. From this point onward, no generically new topics are introduced with the exception of the brilliant style, which serves to provide an appropriate flourish for the end of the movement. (Agawu 1991, 114.)

As Agawu shows, the first 48 bars comprise a total of eight topics, sometimes shifting rapidly and even sounding simultaneously in the first eight bars. Agawu notes that 'faced with such an unstable musical surface' as that of Op. 132, contemporary music analysis of the 1980s, especially that of the 'neo-Schenkerian variety,' invokes the neutral notion of *design* to account for changes of texture and figuration (Agawu 1991, 113). However, Agawu rejects the 'general principle' proposed by John Rothgeb (1977, 73, quoted in Agawu, 113), according to which changes in surface design usually coincide with crucial structural points. Agawu's main objection towards the notion of design concerns the implication that the variables that generate a musical surface are in any sense neutral or value-free (ibid., 113). As Agawu notes: 'To hold this view is to remove oneself completely from the implications of an intertextual musical discourse in which referentiality plays a major role' (ibid., 114). Therefore, Agawu suggests his 'semiotic approach sensitive to the historical and stylistic specificity of this particular musical surface' instead of Rothgeb's notion of an 'ahistorical, value-free design' (ibid.).

Furthermore, Agawu suggests that, in the movement, the succession of topics reveals a gradual shift from metric instability to metric stability. The learned style in the beginning defines a pulse, the cadenza then erases this pulse. The march is presented and the arrival of the gavotte reinforces the shift toward metric regularity, a condition that is fully established with the arrival of aria. 'A process of destabilization begins soon after the aria, and from this point on we experience various dynamic transitions to and from metric regularity' (ibid., 117). As Agawu notes:

> The 'background' of this movement as defined by topical signification consists, therefore, not of a pitch-defined, arhythmic *Ursatz*, but rather of a rhythmically defined functional stability that moves in and out of subsidiary levels of instability. One therefore does not impose a dimensional hierarchy on the piece, but approaches the idea of background metaphorically. (Agawu 1991, 117.)

Agawu (1991, 117) suggests the erratic surface, the understatement of most topics, and the overall quality of instability make up for a possible compositional plot for this movement. However, he does not develop the content of that plot any further. He only claims that the oppositions between high and low styles, between sacred and profane,

and between the spontaneity of aria and the self-consciousness of learned style constitute an attractive framework for a plot. 'This helps to explain,' Agawu writes, 'why a solemn motet for strings in a decidedly high style and infused with fantasy elements is suddenly interrupted by virtuoso display, then by a middle-style march, and then by a high-style dance (gavotte), and finally by the emergence of an operatic character' (Agawu, 1991, 117). Nonetheless, Agawu notes that the listing of topics does not as such offer any explanation for the nature of Op. 132's internal conjunctions, beyond the observation that the movement is marked by contrast and a plurality of topical references (ibid., 116). Rather, he suggests that

> we need to acknowledge the inadequacy of topics as ontological signs, and replace that formulation with structuralist notions of arbitrary signs, for it seems clear that even those listeners for whom the referential elements are real and substantive would agree that the individual gestures derive their importance less from their paradigmatic or associative properties than from their syntagmatic or temporal ones. For if the relationships between phenomena determine their nature rather than any intrinsic aspect of the phenomena themselves, then it is to the domain of absolute diachrony that we must turn. (Agawu 1991, 117.)

Ultimately, Agawu concludes that the surface does not signify anything coherent. However, he does not see the piece as disunified, as he finds continuity on the subsurface level. Agawu's concepts of the unity of the subsurface will be developed further in Chapter 4.

McClary's view

Susan McClary (2000) bases her view of the first movement of Beethoven's Op. 132 largely on Agawu's (1991). She draws upon his insights, but continues from where he left off reaching far more controversial conclusions. McClary argues that Agawu 'reads the exposition as a random assortment of *topoi* littering the surface; and although he carefully classifies them all according to traditional associations, he decides ultimately that they do not signify anything coherent' (McClary 2000, 119–21). According to her own Adorno-inspired view, '[f]ew pieces offer so vivid an

image of shattered subjectivity as the opening page of Op. 132' (ibid., 119). Moreover, she writes:

> In contrast to typical sonata movements, which pursue the activities of a principal theme, this one presents within its first key area four radically contrasting ideas, differentiated not only by melodic contour but by the worlds to which they would seem to refer—if, indeed, reference can be said to be operative any longer. (McClary 2000, 119.)

The four worlds the four ideas are said to refer to are, in order of appearance, 'the Renaissance motet, the virtuoso solo cadenza/recitative, the pathos-ridden aria, and the march.' In addition, the transition adds a dance (McClary 2000, 121–2). Thus, as Hatten (2004, 272) points out, McClary identifies the topics slightly differently compared to Agawu. If bar 11 for Agawu represented march, McClary sees it as aria, while the march, in McClary's interpretation, begins only in bar 15. McClary argues that the affective devices embedded in all these snippets draw on a long history of shared codes: '[T]he twisting minor chords, yearning sevenths, ambiguous diminished chords, distorted Neapolitan inflections, appoggiaturas, and suspensions that make up the surface all belong to the most agonized corner of an affective palette that descends from the Renaissance madrigal' (McClary 2000, 122).

McClary bases her view of Op. 132 partly on an interpretation offered by Joseph Kerman in an early essay on the piece (Kerman 1952, 32–55, referred to in McClary 2000, 119–138). She claims to propose 'a kind of reconciliation between Kerman's humanist interpretation and Agawu's formal analysis' (ibid., 119). Contrary to Agawu, Kerman, according to McClary, 'prefers to interpret the surface as signifying, even if the process he traces borders on incoherence' (McClary 2000, 121). 'For it surely cannot be coincidental,' McClary writes, 'that the tattered signifiers that parade by in confusion in this movement refer to the most readily recognized, the most privileged of genre-types' (ibid.). As McClary further notes: 'What emerges from this collage of deracinated, apparently unrelated *topoi* is at least a consistent tone described by Kerman as "suffering." We may not be able to make immediate sense of the succession of events in Op. 132, but we can at least recognize the signs of anguish' (ibid., 122). Concerned with conventions as she is, McClary further notes:

In other words, if Beethoven does everything within his power to shred conventions as he goes, he can proceed only by means of those very conventions. He calls up moments of an orderly social world, with its religious rituals, dances, military exercises, lyric songs, and modes of virtuosic display, even though his collage destabilizes their meanings. We may be witnessing the rantings of a madman who has lost the ability to forge articulate meanings, or a nightmare in which warped fragments of the everyday appear as though randomly shuffled, or a level of interiority that refuses to marshall its impulses into the tidy wrappers of eighteenth-century form. … Nowhere in this quartet do we find unmediated expression. (McClary 2000, 122.)

McClary notes that structural unfolding often serves as the key to these kind of inchoate openings, 'especially during this period when the act of "becoming" figures so prominently in cultural agendas' (McClary 2000, 122). In the same way that the *Eroica* began with little more than a snippet and gradually earned a sustainable identity by annexing whatever it encountered, McClary suggests we might presume reconciliation between the heterogeneous elements in Opus 132 and anticipate that the conflicted beginning will have achieved coherent articulation by the end of the movement. As McClary writes:

the exposition's second theme not only presents a balanced instance of what seems a full-fledged entity [bar 48] … but proceeds to start annexing into its affirmative context the snippets from the opening section: the erratic sixteenth notes of what Kerman calls a scream become the means for directed forward motion, the march rhythms lend decisiveness, and the tortured intervals of the motet now contribute only the signs of yearning that the sensitive bourgeois subject must possess. Yet at the last moment of the exposition, the fusion falls apart. (McClary 2000, 123.)

Although the fusion is told to fall apart, McClary still suggests a variety of ways in which we may make sense of the movement. Among other things, she suggests we might seek the help of Fredric Jameson who theorizes about the schizophrenic postmodern subject, in which the surface that used to be guaranteed by a sense of underlying depth has become mere surface for the inconsequential playing with signs—that is an open and honest travesty of the title of Agawu's book (McClary 2000, 125). McClary stresses that John Cage is a crucial figure for Jameson's

argument, in that Cage retains external form but fills it with whatever his chance operations happen to yield. 'In fact, we might imagine a piece by Cage that would produce something like the first page of Op. 132 through the random switching of a radio dial. Yet surely Beethoven—even Beethoven *in extremis*—is not Cage,' McClary concludes (ibid.). Instead, she turns to Kerman, who suggests that Beethoven's ruptured surface produces 'a carefully calculated effect' and that 'Beethoven is employing those particular signs and procedures for reasons that will eventually become intelligible' (ibid.). Following Kerman's idea of the beginning of the Great Fugue as constituting a 'table of contents' for the rest of the movement, McClary argues that the whole first movement of Op. 132 can be heard as 'three rough drafts of such a table' (ibid., 124). The first draft on the first page includes all the ingredients of the quartet as a whole. As McClary puts it:

> Beethoven designs this opening in such a way as to deflect forward the listener's desire to witness the consolidation of meaning, away from the typically autonomous first movement and toward the series of movements that follows. And here we find each of the associative shards introduced in the first section now expanded into a full-blown articulation: first, the dance and affirmative lyrical elements [second movement], then the sacred motet with the *Heiliger Dankgesang* [third movement], next a march interrupted by recitative [fourth movement], and at last a finale marked with the singing pathos of the fragment that emerged as the anchor of movement I. (McClary 2000, 128–9.)

Furthermore, McClary (2000, 129) suggests yet another way in which we might make sense out of the first movement of Op. 132: 'If the topoi of the introduction seemed an arbitrary assortment, like shuffled tarot cards, they begin to become meaningful when each becomes a whole episode arranged within a linear sequence.' Following Kerman, McClary suggests the sequence represents a kind of journey:

> Along with Kerman, I hear this sequence as representing something of a journey—though emphatically not the always-already guaranteed journey to Utopia of the standard tonal process, best exemplified by Beethoven's own middle period. If there is heroicism in Op. 132, it manifests itself not in the triumph of identity (the story sonata and tonality tend to tell, left to their own devices), but in the fact that its implied persona embraces each of its topical realms in turn, finds that no single one

provides a satisfactory answer, and eventually attempts to forge an ending even though closure itself—along with unconflicted identity—has been acknowledged as vanity. If the subject of Op. 132 is not the unified tune of the *Eroica* but rather that tangle of contradictory impulses revealed on the opening page, then this process is perhaps an ideal way of telling its story while preserving its peculiar form of identity. To reconcile the antinomies would be to destroy what is fundamental to this particular subject. (McClary 2000, 129.)

In both Agawu's and McClary's readings, the surface is ultimately seen as disunified. Although meaning exists through topical signification and the surface refers to places both within and outside the work, the surface is considered both ruptured and incoherent. Unity is sought through other aspects of the music, which will be treated in detail in the following chapters.

3. Unity of form

This chapter is concerned with arguments about form in Beethoven's Op. 132, first movement, as presented by Kofi Agawu (1991), Robin Wallace (1989), Daniel Chua (1995), Susan McClary (2000), and Frank Samarotto (2009). The problems that will be addressed include sonata form as a formal framework, formal boundaries and form-defining moments, the problem of the 'double returns,' the structural ambiguity of the form, and Schenkerian *Urlinie* as a form-defining feature. Agawu (1991, 118) notes that Beethoven makes certain representations toward sonata form although the form is never normatively enacted. Wallace (1989, 9) suggests that Beethoven might have deliberately played upon a certain structural ambiguity inherent in the form he created. Both Chua (1995) and Samarotto (2009) approach the movement through the notion of a Schenkerian descent to $\hat{2}$ typical of sonata form movements. Finally, Susan McClary (2000) offers an open-ended model according to which the form of the first movement is comprised of fragments that will be developed over the course of the quartet as a whole.

A few landmarks should be pointed out in the overall form of Op. 132, first movement: The quartet begins with a slow introduction in bars 1–8, followed by the first theme starting in bar 10. The transition begins in bar 23, while bar 48 brings about the second theme in F major. The development section begins in bar 75. Bar 92 has constituted a major problem for Adorno-influenced scholars who have seen it as an *aporia* or a moment of emptiness or absence (Chua 1995, 98; Spitzer 2006). The most prominent formal problem concerns the two returns of opening material, in bars 103 and 193, respectively. Which one of these represents the true recapitulation? In bar 103, opening material is exclaimed in the dominant minor, E minor. In bar 193, the opening material appears in the tonic, A minor. One final focal point remains, bar 232, from where the coda begins.

Sonata form as formal framework

Agawu notes that the 'rhetorical process, the argument of this movement … is conducted within the framework of sonata form' (Agawu 1991, 118). However, Agawu states that we should be aware that both sonata form and the beginning–middle–ending paradigm achieve their explanatory power 'more negatively than positively.' That is, it is the departure from a normative enactment of sonata form, or from the use of material conventionally symbolizing beginning, middle or ending that constitute the key characteristic of the movement. (Ibid.) Agawu writes:

> These divergences in the reading of the formal layout arise out of certain representations that Beethoven makes toward sonata form—representations that are, however, never normatively enacted. By virtue of the aria in F major alone, one can rightly speak of a second subject or, more properly, of a second key area, just as one can speak confidently of a recapitulation, since material presented earlier in A minor and F major is reconciled in the reappearance of A minor (with a touch of A major) later on. On the other hand, the appearance of the thematic substance of the A minor and F major areas in the middle of the movement in E minor and C major respectively [bars 103 ff] disrupts the normative gesture of sonata form, and embarrasses both the analyst who sees it as a thematic but not a harmonic recapitulation, and the one who sees it as a mere development—the former because the harmonic environment makes nonsense of any notion of a recapitulation, and the latter because such a wholesale restatement is uncharacteristic of a genuine development section. (Agawu 1991, 118.)

Ultimately, Agawu decides to go for an interpretation of sonata form as a 'signifying model against the backdrop of a harmonically-defined process':

> The questions of two expositions versus one development, two developments versus one exposition, or one exposition versus two recapitulations need not detain us further, because the issue will never be settled. Indeed a search for the "truth" may not lie with those analysts anxious to distribute the reality of this movement into a sonata-form model, especially if conflict and lack of resolution are essential to late Beethoven. If we think of sonata form as a signifying model against the backdrop of a normative, harmonically-defined process, then the logic of Beethoven's formal

strategy is at once evident. There is, first, a statement of contrasting premises (A minor and F major), then a prolongation of the resulting conflict (E minor, C major, and others), and finally a resolution (A minor/A major/A minor). It may therefore be argued that it is unimportant how one chooses to label the individual sections of the movement, so long as one grasps the logic of tonal relations. (Agawu 1991, 118–120.)

An undecided form – a deliberate choice

Robin Wallace proposes another possible explanation for the dilemma of the overall form. In the first movement of Op. 132, Wallace (1989, 9) finds a 'structural peculiarity which many commentators have observed, but none has adequately resolved'. Wallace thinks of the movement as having 'two unique and self-sufficient recapitulations: the first beginning in the dominant, E minor [bar 103], and proceeding through the mediant, C major, while the second begins in the tonic, A minor [bar 193], and proceeds through the tonic major, A major' (ibid.). Instead of trying to resolve the issue of which of these sections is the 'true' recapitulation, Wallace proposes a solution in the form of a question, which forms the basic argument for his whole article:

> might not Beethoven, in this movement, have deliberately played upon the structural ambiguity inherent in the form which he created, in order to impress the listener with the possibility of divergent expressive interpretations? (Wallace 1989, 9.)

Wallace goes on to account for the many ambiguities he finds in the movement and comes up with a few important remarks: there is the 'obvious conflict between the rival recapitulations,' there is the tonal plan of the movement, which 'vacillates constantly between minor and major keys before concluding resolutely with a march-like section in A minor.' (Wallace 1989, 9–10.) Moreover, there is the opposition of the pleading first theme and the relaxed, lyrical second theme—'perhaps a deliberate exaggeration for rhetorical purposes of the sort of contrast which by this time had become fairly standard in sonata form.' (Ibid.) Wallace still notes one ambiguity concerning the tonality of the movement, which 'in a very real sense … is in A major [as well as A minor]' (ibid., 11). This ambiguity will be treated more in detail in the following chapter.

Bar 92 – a climactic 'nothing'

Speaking about a moment in bar 92, Daniel Chua (1995, 88) notes the following on the function of the development section, starting in bar 74:

> It is, so to speak, an 'anti-development,' no longer working out its material powerfully towards the recapitulation; rather, there is an internal fracturing of form: the crisis of contrast is pressed to the breaking point until it negates itself in seemingly contingent gestures. At its very climax the development arrives at a state of *aporia*, quite literally a moment of 'real absence,' as the music empties itself: in bar 92 there is silence. (Chua 1995, 88.)

For Chua, the poignancy of this climactic 'nothing' is perhaps most sharply felt through Schenkerian sensibilities. According to Chua, it is precisely at the moment of the penultimate step $\hat{3}$ of the alleged Schenkerian descent that there is 'a lacuna, a blank, followed by something that is absurd not only in its inversion of expectations but in its denial of the melodic pitch C' (Chua 1995, 90, see Example 1). For Chua, it is not enough that the music is momentarily in the key of C, nor is it enough to assert $\hat{3}$ through the C in the bass (bars 92 ff). He cannot find the $\hat{3}$ from where the descent to $\hat{2}$ would start. As Chua notes, 'at a critical point in the form a structural pillar is removed, and Schenkerian theory is faced with *kenosis*—an absence thrown into relief by the extremity of the gestural contrast' (ibid.).

Example 1. Chua's illustration of the 'missing' $\hat{3}$ in the development of Op. 132 (Chua 1995, 90).

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Bar 103 – a shocking moment

A few bars later, in bar 103, another form-defining moment comes with the extensive repetition of opening material in E minor, the minor-mode dominant of the home key. How should this be interpreted: Is it part of an ongoing development or is it a recapitulation of some kind? Frank Samarotto (2009, 19) describes the moment as a 'shockingly violent gesture for this work's relatively muted rhetoric.' Samarotto continues by saying:

> It is as if the persistence of the slow introduction into the *Allegro* suddenly takes on an aggressively active character, as if the languid *sostenuto* [the character of the opening bars] concealed a darker, more forceful side. Thus it is not enough to begin the development with a recreation of the opening material in its pianissimo and legato guise [bar 74]; this is soon dismissed. The hesitant continuations of mm. 74 and 92 are replaced by the opening motto stated as emphatically as possible: the whole quartet in triple octaves beginning *fortissimo* [bar 103]. (Samarotto 2009, 19.)

Samarotto (ibid.) concludes that '[w]hat follows [in bar 103] is famously called a restatement of the exposition transposed to E minor (with all the formal problems that entails), but it is not exactly that, and the differences are telling.' According to Samarotto (ibid., 20), the passage in bars 103–118 recreates exactly the proportions of the opening *Assai sostenuto*, with a few differences. For instance, 'it lacks the harmonic alternation of tonic and dominant, remaining insistently in E minor' (ibid.). Also, '[t]he cadential drive in the previous bar [102] prepares us for the tonic of E minor. We get the leading tone instead, materially a dominant, but the fortissimo dynamic stresses it as an appoggiatura, conceptually replacing the tonic' (ibid.). Finally, a 'remarkable and far-reaching detail' is found in bars 107–8:

> the tonic here is clearly E minor, but Beethoven reworks the figuration to restate the diminished-fourth motive … on its original pitches (save the G♮ for the final G♯), in its original register, and *as if in its original key!* Besides the extraordinary reach of the opening into this distant area, the recall of a motive so exactly allows a long-range connection between the C6 of the *Kopfton* [bar 21] … with B6 that represents the motion to $\hat{2}$ and the interruption expected in sonata form [bar 131].
> (Samarotto 2009, 20, original italics. See Example 2 and Example 6.)

Example 2. Voice-leading sketch overview of the entire first movement of Beethoven's Op. 132 (Samarotto 2009, 25).

An unresolved approach

Susan McClary endorses a somewhat ambiguous and unresolved approach to the question of the form as a whole. She describes the passage starting in bar 103 as an 'extensive formal block that has caused much consternation among analysts. Because it rehearses the principal events of the opening section, it is often labelled a recapitulation—in fact, the first of two, because this very same sequence occurs yet again.' (McClary 2000, 123.) She also notes a certain ambiguity already in Joseph Kerman's writings on the passage: in his early essay (1952) Kerman treated the two blocks [starting in bar 103 and 193 respectively] as recapitulation and coda, though in his book on the Beethoven Quartets (1966) he endorsed the dual-recapitulation solution (McClary 2000, 124). McClary offers her own (re)solution to the problem of the recapitulation and coda versus dual-recapitulation model, and escapes through the back door in saying that

> It is, of course, both and neither of these options. What is important is that process itself has been thrown into confusion and thus hovers somewhere between refusing conventional structure altogether and obeying it so mechanically that the reiteration of reified formal blocks threatens to take precedence over the actual materials. I prefer to think of the movement as composed of three attempted expositions, each of which is discarded in preparation for the next. (McClary 2000, 124.)

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Furthermore, McClary notes the following on the overall form of the movement:

> Fragments of all the materials that will be explored over the course of the whole quartet appear in this opening movement … Yet Beethoven does put these elements through the paces of sonata, as though this scrap heap itself constituted a traditional subject. And despite the radical dismemberment of the opening motto in the coda (each pitch appears in mm. 232–35 in a different instrument as a background pedal tone), he even presents us with "closure" of a sort: a rhythmically decisive cadence on the tonic, A minor, but with a fit of newly spawned violin figuration that seems designed as a means of insisting (however irrationally) that this is the end, goddamn it! (McClary 2000, 124–5.)

For Samarotto, the question of the overall form of the movement is equally a question about closure, as he notes the following towards the end:

> It is late in the piece, not long to go, and the form has not been settled, not for the listener and not for the piece. The question is one of closure. It is not that we have not had enough of it (perhaps requiring an emphatic coda?)—we have not had any of it. … The piece is acting out a pantomime of sonata form, but its inner conflicts do not allow it to believe in its substance. (Samarotto 2009, 22.)

What Samarotto means by this statement is explained, more precisely, a few paragraphs later:

> The movement does close with strongly material representatives of tonic and dominant, but with a conviction that seems to extend only to local events. The overall form is somehow represented, but the form as a whole is not satisfyingly consummated. This is because the stuff on which the form is grounded is itself conflicted to its core. It is not enough to say that the design simulates some possible sonata scheme. The material that informs it does not have the conviction to support that scheme. (Samarotto 2009, 23.)

And at last Samarotto concludes:

> This extraordinary movement, teetering at the edge of coherence, is obsessed with its inner tensions at all levels, forming a unity not of motives or formal schemes but of inner conflicts which it cannot resist—an uneasy unity of dividedness.
> (Samarotto 2009, 23.)

In this chapter, we have witnessed a variety of attempts to make sense of the form of Beethoven's Op. 132, first movement. No definite answers were presented. No all-encompassing master narratives were unveiled. None of the writers denied the existence of sonata form, yet none pointed out definite correlations to specific parts of that scheme. Agawu offered a middle-of-the-road view of sonata form as a signifying model against the backdrop of a harmonically-defined process. Samarotto's and Chua's notions of the Schenkerian descent are rooted in a Schenkerian view of sonata form. McClary and Wallace stress the ambiguous in this movement by stating that process itself has been thrown into confusion (McClary 2000, 124) and that Beethoven deliberate plays on the structural ambiguity (Wallace 1989, 9). Samarotto's concluding view of the large-scale form is both honest and apt: the piece is inevitably in some kind of sonata form, although the material that informs it is too conflicted to support that scheme.

4. Unity of subsurface

This chapter is concerned with issues of subsurface, tonality and background in Op. 132, first movement. I will present Agawu's (1991) notion of subsurface continuity through the circle of fifths, Wallace's (1989) considerations on the *Urlinie* including his notion of major–minor oscillation, Samarotto's (2009) considerations on tonal stability, and, finally, McClary's (2000) notion of F major as the symbolic Never Never Land for Beethoven. Samarotto will perhaps be treated in greater detail than the others due to his detailed account of the underlying harmonic structures. Inevitably, this chapter is also concerned with issues of form and motivic features insofar as they concern the tonality of the movement—for instance, the discussion about Wallace deals largely with issues of form. Over the course of this chapter, I will explore to what extent these theories of subsurface continuity grant coherence to the piece.

Agawu's scuba diving and circle of fifths

Susan McClary (2000, 121) has humorously noted that Kofi Agawu—faced with the dismembered surface of Op. 132's first movement—'dives below the wreckage of the surface in hopes of discovering continuity at a deeper level.' Agawu does indeed find continuity on a deeper level, but it is not the kind of continuity that would grant the piece coherence in every respect; rather, it is a relative coherence which compensates for the radical discontinuity of the surface. Agawu argues that

> a familiar construct … —the circle of fifths—may be shown to underlie the harmonic
> process of the entire movement, cutting across the obvious points of formal
> articulation and lending the whole process a subsurface continuity.
> (Agawu 1991, 120–1.)

Beginning with A, the movement travels through five cycles of the circle. As Agawu (1991, 121) notes, 'each cycle is … defective—there is no enactment of the ideal.' The starting points for each cycle coincide with formally significant points, but the selection of notes seems somewhat arbitrary. Agawu (ibid.) contends that

'[s]pecifically, three, then one, then four, then two, and then, again, two steps are omitted from the respective cycles. … All seven possible points are occurrent, although not in any one cycle.' Example 3 shows Agawu's account of the more or less coherent circles of fifths. It may be argued that dealing with such vague representations of the circle of fifths questions the whole theory. For Agawu, the listener's familiarity with the construct, however, serves to guarantee its perceptual significance:

> With each point of entry into the world of harmonic syntax in the first movement of Beethoven's Op. 132, we have encountered either an obstacle or a signficant [sic] absence [in the form of defective or incomplete circles of fifths]. … The business of defective cycles continues to underscore the significance of instability, lack of completion, and perhaps even lack of unity. For although—to take the circle of fifths as an example—there is never a complete journey through its span, familiarity with the construct serves to guarantee its perceptual significance, making the notions of ideal and defective purely theoretical phenomena. (Agawu 1991, 121.)

Agawu further suggests that the relationship between the domains, between surface and subsurface, 'is one of disjunction, a disjunction whose rhetorical force transcends the normative disjunction between domains that lies at the heart of every expressive structure' (ibid., 121). I quote Agawu's description of this condition of disjunction between domains, as he notes that his analysis has shown

> that the varied, highly contrasted, even apparently disjunct topical discourse that characterizes the surface of the movement contrasts sharply with the high level of continuity in harmonic process. There are no "bumps" in the latter, and where there are shortcuts, their articulation counters any feeling that something is inconsequential. (Agawu 1991, 121.)

For the sake of brevity, I have chosen not to present any of Agawu's numerous examples of instances where the surface and subsurface levels collide. Instead, it will suffice to note that the structural tension between the two domains is, in Agawu's reading, perhaps most violent at the end of the movement, specifically in the last eleven measures, where Beethoven, according to Agawu (1991, 124–5), until the final bars, challenges senses of closure and ending.

Example 3. Agawu's account of structural elements (circle of fifths) in Beethoven's Op. 132, first movement (Agawu 1991, 119–20).

Wallace's being in two keys

Robin Wallace (1989) suggests an outline of the underlying, background bass line of Op. 132's first movement (see Example 4). Wallace's graphical presentation emphasises the opening cello motive 'to show its structural significance' and then provides a note-head for each important statement either of the opening theme of the Allegro section or of the contrasting theme (ibid., 10). Wallace argues that '[i]t is immediately evident that the key structure of the entire movement is a "composing out" of the F-E appoggiatura in the opening motive; this explains why the "first" recapitulation occurs in E minor, which may be heard as a resolution of the F major in which the contrasting theme was heard at its first appearance in the exposition.' (Ibid.) However, as Wallace notes

> What is particularly remarkable … is that the 'second' recapitulation of the main theme which begins at m. 193 … receives no background emphasis; this is not an arbitrary decision on my part, but reflects the fact that the theme is nowhere harmonized with a structurally significant A-minor triad. (Wallace 1989, 10.)


Example 4. Background bass line of Op. 132, first movement (Wallace 1989, 10).

Thus, Wallace (ibid., 11) concludes that far from being a harmonic recapitulation, this 'second' recapitulation (bar 193) is 'simply a contrapuntal development of the two main themes of the movement.' For Wallace, the 'true' return of the tonic, then, occurs with the restatement of the second theme in A major beginning in bar 223 (ibid.). Wallace suggests it is insufficient to account for the voice-leading layout of the movement with a normative interrupted $\hat{5}$–$\hat{1}$ *Urlinie* descent in A minor. Rather, he suggests we must provide an alternative reading of the *Urlinie* in order to adequately explain this play with A major in bar 223 (see Example 5). Wallace further explains:

As can be seen, this reading yields an *Urlinie* which follows an unambiguous and uninterrupted descent from 5 to 1, but which includes C-sharp, not C-natural, as the third degree. A striking cross-relation is thus established with the structural C-natural in the bass which underlies the statement of the contrasting theme in the 'first' recapitulation [bar 103 ff.]. More important, however, is the fact that if we accept this reading, then it must appear that Beethoven contradicts the explicit tonality of the movement by having the background descend through a major key, giving the C-sharp in m. 223 a structural significance that far transcends its context, and justifies the extreme care which Beethoven takes in preparing and harmonizing this note. To the ambiguities already observed in this movement may thus be added one which concerns its very tonality: it appears to be in A minor, but in a very real sense it is in A major as well. (Wallace 1989, 11.)

Wallace argues that this second appearance of the contrasting theme in A major becomes the 'key to the form of the entire movement' (ibid., 14). 'Beethoven thus challenges the listener to reverse his or her conceptions of the relative significance of A minor and major, and of the meaning of the half-step relationship C/C-sharp' (ibid., 14–15).
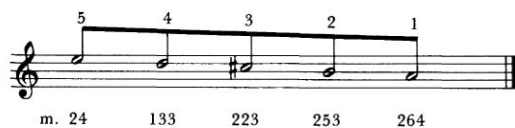
Example 5. Wallace's alternative *Urlinie* reading: uninterrupted descent from 5 to 1 (Wallace 1989, 12).

Moreover, Wallace adds an argument which has received little emphasis by the other writers, that is an argument of expression and emotional content. Wallace states that '[t]he second theme, relatively insignificant at the foreground level, has become the focal point for the expressive background. … Even more important is the fact that in this movement the expressive and structural elements do not conflict; they are literally one and the same.' (Ibid., 15.) Wallace states that the complexity of the emotional content 'makes it unlikely that two listeners will hear the music in exactly the same manner,' and that Beethoven, therefore, perhaps in Op. 132 at least, 'chose to capitalize on this fact by making the music deliberately ambiguous in as many ways as possible' (ibid., 15–16). Furthermore, Wallace concludes that the unique content of

Op. 132's first movement is an assertion that an emotional message—although impossible to objectively verify—is nevertheless significant and may generate 'strength and assurance rather than confusion' (ibid., 16–17).

This is the important lesson of Wallace's: in spite of its deliberately ambiguous form, there is something in the first movement of Beethoven's Op. 132 generating 'strength and assurance rather than confusion.' It is a matter of making sense of the irrational. Also, strength and assurance refer to stability and clarity of thought, qualities that stand in sharp contrast with, for instance, Agawu's emphasis on conflicts and irresolvable dilemmas. Moreover, I find it remarkable that Wallace writes of the second theme as 'relatively insignificant,' for as we shall see now, the second theme is not at all seen as that insignificant by writers such as Samarotto and McClary, even at the foreground level.

Samarotto and the temporary resolution

Samarotto (2009, 23) notes that 'the stuff on which the form is grounded is itself conflicted to its core' and that the material that informs the sonata scheme, therefore, 'does not have the conviction to support it'. I will now explore the basis for Samarotto's argument and account for the tonal tensions which, in Samarotto's view, make up for the main conflict of Op. 132's first movement. Samarotto will be treated in greater detail than the other writers hitherto.

According to Samarotto, the work's musical language is notoriously simplistic featuring unusually conservative tonal materials. He states that this movement is 'arguably Beethoven's most thoroughgoing essay in the art of problematizing the simplest of tonal relations and of discovering in them hitherto unexplored worlds' (Samarotto 2009, 2). At the core of Samarotto's reading lies the idea of a divided tonic, 'a tonic conflicted against itself, undermined by its equivocal presentation.' A similar internal conflict is found in the motion of the work's phrase rhythm, and in our perception of the movement's basic temporality. Samarotto argues that '[t]he conflict is brought full circle—but not resolved—in its contradictory realization of sonata form.' (ibid.)

Samarotto notes that the situation with Op. 132 is 'exquisitely subtle' as regards the opening tonic that constitutes the foundation on which a Classical piece stands: 'there is no question of a tonic presence—indeed, the turn away from the tonic key at the very end of m. 29 is jarringly forceful—yet actual manifestations of an opening tonic are maddeningly elusive, compromised at every turn' (ibid., 3). Samarotto goes on to list a number of instances of this compromised tonic on the opening page and concludes that '[a]ll this equivocation leaves one with a sort of cognitive dissonance: the stable ground of tonic is somehow there but at every turn eludes our grasp' (ibid., 4).

A central piece of argument for Samarotto is the division between *conceptuality* and *materiality* in music. This also explains the absence of any materialisation of the tonic on the opening page: 'It is so commonplace to refer to music being in a key,' Samarotto writes, 'that it is easy to forget how abstract this claim is. The sense that a tonic key or tonic prolongation pervades moments where no tonic is present is highly conceptual, a thing of the mind rather than of actual sound. This in no way negates the power of this idea; it simply points to a possible tension between the sonic experience and our comprehension of it.' (Samarotto 2009, 4.) Samarotto argues that we normally expect a balance between our conceptual sense of key and its material representatives. However, the discrepancy between these two elements becomes particularly severe when the prolonged harmony that serves as the structural anchor of an entire movement must be assumed but its manifestations in sounds are not nearly commensurate with its importance. 'In these situations we experience a tension between our conceptual sense of a tonic's structural superiority and the inability to latch onto a secure material presence.' (Ibid., 4–5.)

Furthermore, Samarotto presents us with a voice-leading graph (Example 6) showing a conceptual tonic, placed in a separate bass staff, existing outside the sounding reality of the piece, but more 'hidden in the cracks than filling the background' (ibid., 10). 'The surface,' he claims, 'is dominated by jagged unfoldings, pairings isolated from each other, out of which two continuities seek realization' (ibid.).

Example 6. Voice-leading sketch of Beethoven's Op. 132, first movement, bars 1–48 (Samarotto 2009, 12–13).

The first continuity is a rising stepwise bass, scarcely recognizable on its first pass, but crystallized into a whole by the explicit statement in bars 15–21. The second is the emerging diminished fourth in the top voice in bars 5–6, 'an almost-lyrical moment of tonic assertion that collapses before it can stabilize' (ibid.). According to Samarotto, the first two systems of Example 6 each show an attempt to reach $\hat{3}$ undergirded by similar stepwise basses, and they look very much like two versions of the same material. However, he notes:

> What is remarkable is that these two systems depict disparate passages that should function quite differently: the *Assai sostenuto*, presumably serving as a slow introduction, and the first sixteen bars of the *Allegro*, presumably acting as a thematic exposition. Indeed, the bassline of the introduction only completes itself six bars into the *Allegro*, coming to rest on a structural V. The formal divisions are as blurred as the formal functions are ambiguous. Under the domain of the divided tonic, the clarity that would set these apart is not possible; all is clouded by this *sub rosa* conflict. (Samarotto 2009, 10–11.)

Continuing on the theme of conceptuality versus materiality, Samarotto describes the opening page of Op. 132's first movement with the following words:

> An acute tension between conceptuality and materiality finds an … exquisite expression in Op. 132's opening movement. Here the celebrated *Urmotiv* embodied in the first four notes must be considered beyond its face value as a pitch series performing some unifying function (and a vague and general one, at that). Quite the opposite: its tonal function is highly divisive, and carefully crafted as such. (Samarotto 2009, 5.)

According to Samarotto, the cello's G♯–A–F–E fragments the tonic chord into its component root and fifth, 'each placed in a weak metric position by the dissonant element that precedes and displaces it' (ibid., 5). Samarotto suggests that this is best interpreted through Schenker's technique of unfolding, in which intervals conceptually heard as sounding together are separated in time, unfolded into a melodic sequence (ibid.). As Samarotto's example shows (Example 7), the tonic is compromised by the harmonization of E by the viola's G♯. This V could stand as

prolongation of I; however, Samarotto suggests the opening G♯ draws us towards hearing a prolonged dominant throughout this motive, raising the possibility of an entirely illusory tonic, 'one that slips from our grasp no sooner than we hear it' (ibid., 6). 'Of course,' Samarotto fatefully states, 'since this motive reappears with notorious frequency throughout this movement, this specially contrived unfolding, with all the conflict it embodies, dominates the discourse, and undermines everything' (ibid.). Moreover: 'Does one hear an overbearing V that resolves into a weak-beat tonic (in m. 6, only to collapse a moment later) or does one insist on tonic simply because one must, against all experience? Neither alternative fully captures this particular divided tonic.' (ibid.)
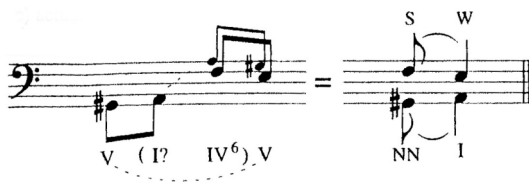
Example 7. Harmonization of the motif in the opening of Op. 132 (Samarotto 2009, 7).

In an attempt to go more into detail with the tonal ambiguity of the four-note cell, Samarotto investigates the G♯–A–B–C line, which he claims 'struggles to emerge' in the opening *Assai sostenuto* passage. 'However hypothetical, this actual line emerges in the first violin in m. 5,' he writes (Samarotto 2009, 6). Furthermore, he states, the filled-in diminished fourth presents us with the possibility of a tonic divided in its prolongational allegiance. 'Since it is not in and of itself a harmonic interval, this diminished fourth admits of at least two tonal interpretations: The G♯ can be a neighbor note to the tonic expression A–C or C can be an auxiliary pitch to the dominant's G♯–B.' (Ibid., 8.) As Samarotto further notes, 'we see inscribed in this diminished fourth the divided tonic engaged in an ongoing discourse of uneasy internal conflict' (ibid.).
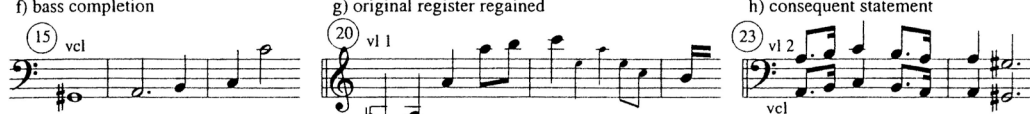
Samarotto (2009, 8) goes on to show how the first appearance of the diminished fourth is 'febrile but tentative, its tonic harmonization weak and uncertain' (Example 8c); then comes the first strained attempt at a primary theme (Example 8d); then an appearance that 'supplies a stronger thematic statement' (Example 8e); the stepwise

motion in the bass 'casts doubt on the stability of m. 16's tonic' (Example 8f);
Example 8g 'stumbles' onto the diminished-fourth motive, 'and by mighty transfers it
back to the highest register only to be undercut by a dominant bass'; the theme's
consequent statement is overridden by the first violin's F–E (Example 8h); in bar 31,
the diminished fourth is 'abruptly transposed' and its expansion into a tritone
'provides a way out of miasma' (Example 8i); last, the second theme, in bar 48,
'finally realizes this motive in a stable form, not only filling in a perfect fourth but
clarifying that fourth as a third, F–A and a neighboring B♭' (Example 8j). As
Samarotto notes at the end, '[t]he ubiquitous conflict of the diminished fourth is here
ameliorated, but only in a key removed from tonic stability.' (Ibid.)

**Example 8. Appearances of the diminished fourth in Beethoven's Op. 132,
first movement (Samarotto 2009, 9).**

As we have seen, Samarotto approaches the question of unity on the subsurface level
primarily through issues of tonic stability. At the core of his argumentation lies the
idea of the divided tonic being conceptually present from the very beginning, but
rarely if ever materialised in a tonic triad. The tonic is undermined by its equivocal
presentation and actual manifestations are 'maddeningly elusive' (Samarotto 2009,
2–3). The problem of the divided tonic becomes particularly evident in the case of the
diminished fourth, which allows for two alternative tonal interpretations: the four-note
cell can be rooted either in tonic or dominant. For Samarotto, 'the resolution of the
diminished fourth's tonal problem occurs not toward the end of the piece, but within
the second theme, and *is temporary*' (Samarotto 2009, 8–9, n14, my emphasis).

Samarotto's emphasis on the resolution of conflict with the second theme is neither extraordinary nor surprising when we look to his other remarks about the second theme: he talks about the arrival of the second theme as a 'transformation of … tense conflict into flowing lyricism' (ibid., 16). Also, Samarotto notes that the accumulation of rhythmic energy in the preceding measures 'is dissipated by coming full circle, to a transformation of itself, languidness become [sic] lyricism, in a foreign key that will not last' (ibid., 17).

F major as Never Never Land

Finally, we may turn to Susan McClary for a concluding notion on the significance of F major as the key of the secondary theme area. McClary draws our attention to the fact that the 'attempted synthesis' between the heterogeneous elements of Op. 132 takes place in that particular key. And she pleads to us to pay attention to the following:

> Note that the attempted synthesis takes place in F major, the sixth degree that increasingly stands for Never Never Land in the economy of ninetheeth-century musical imagery. In later Beethoven and, especially, Schubert, the submediant often substitutes for the too-conventional, too-rational dominant as the second key area. As a major-key area within a minor-key hierarchy, it variously radiates hope, escape, or nostalgia for a lost arcadia—indeed, it comes to invoke a sense of longing for the arcadia of the Enlightenment, even though the irrationality of such devices marks them as irrevocably alienated from the Edenic world of the previous generation. (McClary 2000, 123.)

In this chapter, we have seen how different theories of subsurface continuity grant relative coherence to the present movement. Different writers place different emphases: Wallace and Agawu sought to understand the harmonic processes underlying the overall form. Samarotto paid most attention to a conceptual tonic underlying the movement, while also noting a 'divided tonic' manifested in a tonally unstable diminished-fourth motif. Agawu's incomplete circle of fifths is a theoretical construct with severe defects, but nevertheless an attempt at making sense of the harmony on the subsurface level. Wallace's idea of oscillation between major and

minor is equally an attempt at making sense of harmony and tonality on the subsurface level. More importantly, in Wallace's view, the expressive and structural elements in the first movement of Op. 132 do not conflict; they are literally one and the same. For McClary and Samarotto, the secondary key area, the F major section, represented something of an oasis: McClary sees it as an attempted synthesis between heterogeneous elements, Samarotto finds that the inner tensions inherent in the quartet reach a temporary resolution here. However, the work retains tension which needs to be released.

5. Motivic unity

It has already been noted that the four-note cell at the very beginning of Beethoven's Op. 132, first movement, for some analysts, plays a significant role for shaping and perceiving unity in this movement. In this chapter, I will continue to explore the possibilities of motivic unity, albeit in a different fashion. Up till now, those writers who have argued for the coexistence of unifying and disunifying elements in this movement, have done so arguing that the elements belong to different domains: for instance, if the surface was seen as disrupted and disunified, there were elements on the subsurface level which granted relative coherence (Agawu). Now, in the case of Daniel Chua (1995), he presents us with unifying and disunifying elements within the very same domain: there are elements which simultaneously construct and deconstruct the score, he argues (Chua 1995, 80). Chua's take on the unity–disunity issue is so special that I have devoted this entire chapter to his view. After a few general remarks, I will first present the constructing elements, then, the deconstructing ones.

Chua argues that, in the first movement of Op. 132, unity and disunity, in fact, coexist. By simultaneously arguing for both unity and disunity, Chua places himself at both ends of the unity–disunity axis. Although heavily criticised, his book is a case in point in the way it, with an equally convincing tone, argues for the unity of the work as for the disunity of the same. Perhaps Chua, in the end, arrives at a view slightly more in favour of the disunified; nevertheless, he provides us with a valuable if strange account of the unifying elements of the piece, in particular, its motivic patchwork. For Chua, the key to interpretation is not 'unity in diversity,' but an 'impure mixture of seemingly immiscible elements—unity and disunity together' (Chua 1995, 74–5, 83).

For Chua, motivic integration is one of those 'processes at work, which cause an entire piece to unfold with a logic that creates the peculiarities of the score' (Chua 1995, 5). Indeed, Chua notes that Beethoven 'seems to play with a process of expanding a gesture, shape, or motivic complex into increasingly large structures that encapsulate one another, like a set of Russian dolls, until they fill out a form and even

an entire quartet' (ibid.). However, in his attempt at a simultaneously constructive and deconstructive analysis, Chua also arrives at a point where he says there can be no systematic method of analysing Beethoven's late quartets, since they constantly undermine analysis and challenge all analytical systems and analysts: 'the analytical inadequacies will give way to ambiguities and impasses; harmonic logic will fail to connect, Schenker graphs will "warp" under the strain of demonstrating motivic structures … and motifs will be stretched out of recognition' (ibid., 9). Chua partly blames the analyst and his analytical methods for not finding the supposed unity of the work, and it is by no means surprising that so many of Chua's graphical presentations of motivic connectedness have become so warped. The pursuit of motivic connections is taken to such an extreme that the supposed connectedness becomes a merely, if not totally, theoretical phenomenon—often more conceptual than material, to borrow a concept from Samarotto.

Turning to Adorno, Chua argues that these late works mark an inversion of technique or a negative moment in which the music alienates itself from its former logic. In middle-period Beethoven, a motif is defined with a rhythmic precision that enables it to retain its identity through the dynamic processes of harmonic transformation; therefore, Adorno regards the development sections of middle-period Beethoven as an allegory of individual freedom, with the motif generating itself within the external orders of an objective world, bearing traces of the utopian dream of a reconciliation between individual autonomy and abstract totality. In the late works, however, that dream is shattered, as the motif loses its identity, becoming abstract—not so much rhythmic definition as pitch structure. The former logic of Beethoven's motivic process is destroyed, as it were, and Beethoven turns towards variation and counterpoint to animate forms. (Ibid., 73.)

According to Chua, counterpoint and variation distort, if not erase, motivic identity. Examples of this are seen, for instance, in the third movement of Op. 132, the *Heiliger Dankgesang*, or in the late variation sets, where mottos, melodies and decoration are found in place of proper themes. In the late style, motifs become looser in construction, apt to manipulation, and motivic relationships become disjointed, as only one strand of identity is retained against a background of ever-changing parameters. (Ibid., 79–80.) Although Chua considers Op. 132 a quintessential

example of a work which can be reduced to 'a motivic lattice … animated by variation and counterpoint,' this is not an entirely unproblematic construct:

> In every dimension and on every level, the significance of the motif seemingly manufactures, with ineluctable logic, a structural unity, and autotelic object to be hewn from the score by avid structuralists. … But this motivic object, crystallized through analysis, is not an iconic representation of unity. The arcane contrapuntal texture and the thematic disguises of variation, far from clarifying motivic procedures, actually cloud their identity—the material becomes opaque, gnarled, difficult, and complex. What had formerly been a process for dynamic transformation becomes an agent for recondite expression and the creation of chaos. To claim that the fits and starts of the A minor Quartet make structural sense is to speak of unity and disunity in the same breath. And the unity is an esoteric one; disunity is at the forefront of consciousness. (Chua 1995, 74.)

Constructing elements

Chua largely bases his argumentation for the unity of the work on his numerous findings of the initial four-note cell that he claims appears in a variety of forms throughout the movement. Chua (1995, 58) states that both tonal and motivic coherence can easily be 'culled' from the score. 'After all, *structure* in its barest essentials is stated from the start, as the contrapuntal artifice creates a lattice of interlocking motifs. What the cello announces in the opening bar is a pitch pattern which asserts itself as a source of motivic cohesion. … The motif counterpoints itself. Unity of a nepotistic kind is posited at the start.' (Ibid., original emphasis.) Chua also notes that this four-note motif is one of Deryck Cooke's 'meta-motifs' 'that apparently spill over to unite all the late quartets' (ibid., see also Cooke 1963).

Chua presents us with a musical example which explains the motivic cohesion of the opening bars through prime forms, inversions, retrogrades, retrograde inversions and variants (Example 9). Chua (1995, 58) further argues that there is 'something almost Webernesque about the way in which the atomistic idea is deployed symmetrically against itself, both simultaneously and in canon, in effect implying its own harmonic dialect of diminished inflections and appoggiaturas.' 'In this way,' Chua writes,

'harmonic progressions can be governed motivically even when the identity of the motif is obscured by variation … This is possible because these harmonic implications are already latent in the pitches of the motif itself … and these pitches can be superimposed as diminished harmonies, chained together and juxtaposed.' (Ibid., 58–9.)

P = prime I = inversion R = retrograde RI = retrograde inversion V = variant

Example 9. Chua's account of variants of the motif in the first movement of Op. 132 (Chua 1995, 58).

And there is more. Chua states that the motif is clearly 'embedded in the melody of the first-subject group' (Example 10a); 'and although the second subject seems in such incongruous contrast to the mood and mode of the movement, the motif is there too, not only minimally in the chromatic inflections, but structurally in the melody and the bass' (ibid., 62–3, see Example 10b). Chua argues that such structures 'reflect a deeper unity of a functional nature' (ibid., 63). He writes:

> Returning to the opening of the quartet, where contrast confronts structure, it is
> significant that the motif is there not only on the surface but as a scaffold, hidden by
> processes of variation and counterpoint. The polyphonic lattice of the opening is like
> a theme for variation, so that underlying the contrasts are unifying identities.
> (Chua 1995, 63.)

Example 10. Juxtaposition of motif and melody in the first (a) and second (b) groups in the first movement of Op. 132 (Chua 1995, 62–3).

Chua also argues that the motif acquires a structural, form-defining role, as Beethoven 'employs the three different motivic configurations of the initial entries as structural signs, marking out [the beginning of] each section of the form' (ibid., 67). See Example 11.

Chua justifies his endless pursuit of motivic connectedness by referring to a kind of 'mono-motivic mania' which is likely to captivate the analyst:

> Indeed, this quartet can easily promote a kind of mono-motivic mania in which the analyst is hypnotized by this pitch pattern in vertical, horizontal and contrapuntal formations. The motif is so omnipresent that it can be found in the most peculiar places, cropping up in a common-or-garden bass line … or tucked away in an insignificant inner voice … or caught in the middle of a phrase in a different mode and on a different beat …; it is even etched in the entries of the canonic transition. (Chua 1995, 60–1.)

Example 11. Fugal entries as structural markers in the first movement of Op. 132 (Chua 1995, 68).

Finally, although the score 'is so saturated with motivic significance that it is impossible to isolate and explicate each one' (ibid., 70), Chua offers a concluding remark on the significance of the motivic connectedness:

> the motivic gesture performs on all levels, from surface patterns to underlying structures; this results in a certain ambiguity when moving from one level to another, particularly if the pattern undergoes the internal transformations inherent from the start … so that the motif is not limited to strict retrogrades and inversions. … But the multitude of connections thrown up by the motivic density creates a flexibility which allows long-range links to be forged, so that ultimately [extreme contrasts] … can be bridged. (Chua 1995, 65.)

Elements of deconstruction

Then, like a bolt from the blue sky, Chua's essay turns around its own axis and argues for the disunity of the work. In Op. 132, Chua argues, 'both these difficult forms of variation and counterpoint are at work, simultaneously constructing and de(con)structing the score. Beethoven creates this contradiction by setting parameters against one another, some building and others demolishing' (ibid., 80). For Chua, the beginning of the coda (bar 232) marks just one example of a situation where the identity of the motif is severely questioned (Example 12). Beethoven places the motif in long notes against the melody of the Allegro, but this juxtaposition is hardly perceptible, for the counterpoint is distorted by radical processes of variation; 'although the motif is rhythmically and texturally intact, its identity is severely mangled by extreme registral dislocations as the pitches dart from stave to stave' (ibid.).

Example 12. The beginning of the coda, bar 232, where the identity of the motif is 'severely questioned' (Chua 1995, 80).

At the start of the work, the process is even more complex. The opening polyphony has, according to Chua, all the marks of late-Beethovenian obscurity: 'abstract and arcane, it forms a substructural grid of pitch patterns that will undergo variation procedures. But the processes of variation that follow do not define but distort the very structure they lean on. An act of violence is committed against unity itself.'

(Ibid., 80–1.) However, at a moment of serious self-reflection, Chua comes up with one of his most crucial points, as he contemplates his 'calligraphic patterns':

> Is it not strange that they [the motivic graphs] deal only with pitches? They assume unity on the evidence of one parameter alone, despite the fact that the other parameters are deployed to destroy the very patterns of unity which the graphs emphasize. Even the simplest connection is fraught with difficulties. (Chua 1995, 81.)

Chua exemplifies by referring to the beginning of the Allegro (bar 9, Example 13) and starts explaining:

Example 13. Motivic (dis)connections in the beginning of the Allegro, bar 9, in the first movement of Op. 132 (Chua 1995, 81).

> To force this first motif into a state, one has to leap two octaves, switch from bass function to melodic decoration, bridge two phrases, suppress rhythmic and textural contrasts, discard the dynamic extremes, ignore the 'holes' in the bass, and omit ornamental 'filling.'
>   And even after such acrobatics, the density of the contrapuntal network destroys its own unity by its sheer excess of logic. There are simply too many motifs disconnected by registral, textural, rhythmic, and melodic shifts, so that any analytical reconnection becomes a schizophrenic act, with the analyst lost in a multiplicity of possibilities. (Chua 1995, 81.)

Furthermore, Chua argues that, in the movement, there is a plot based on the recurrence of the opening passage, which eventually reveals the coexistence of opposites. As time passes, the contrasting blocks presented at the start gradually coincide, so that the antithetical elements of the Adagio and the Allegro begin to synthesize, reorientating the initial ambiguity caused by the 'violent acts committed against the pitch structure.' By the development, the contrasting elements of the opening start to overlap. 'The development is certainly disruptive, but in a strange

way it serves to clarify the motif: instead of whittling down the motivic elements, it actually puts the dismembered ideas of the exposition together, revealing the connection between the blocks that were contrasted at the start.' (Chua 1995, 85–6.) 'Thus,' Chua concludes,

> as the movement unfolds, the violence which disfigured the pitch structure of the opening is slowly erased; parameters no longer collide against the structure but collude with it to elucidate connections and absorb contrasts. In time, the music partly undecides its indecisions, and so will revise recollections of the opening and alter subsequent hearings. This does not annul the ambiguity of the work but induces a direction and a dynamic in the play of plurality. In this way, the quartet is not so much a static statement of unity or disunity as a process which is always moving towards synthesis. (Chua 1995, 86–7.)

For Chua, synthesis, however, is never attained:

> in a sense, the closer the synthesis between these contrasts the greater the antagonism, since the ambivalent gestures are forced to coalesce; the temporal violence may be eliminated, but that merely generates an emotional violence in which the gathering of an ancient polyphony (Adagio) with the march (Allegro) compresses past and present, sacred and secular, into a disunified unity. So intense is the concentration that this antagonistic fusion has repercussions throughout the entire quartet … causing a stratification of historical styles and engendering the emotional impasses between movements. Moreover, as the contrasting elements come together at the close of the movement the structure itself becomes ambivalent, vacillating between major and minor modes. (Chua 1995, 87.)

In this chapter, we have seen how Daniel Chua has argued for the coexistence of unity and disunity in the first movement of Beethoven's Op. 132. Chua bases his arguments first and foremost on motivic constructs. The significance of the motif 'seemingly manufactures … a structural unity' (Chua 1995, 74). The motivic gesture performs on all levels, from surface patterns to underlying structures and a 'mono-motivic mania' is likely to captivate the analyst. However, Chua also advances arguments for the disunity of the work. He claims the variation and counterpoint of Op. 132 simultaneously construct and de(con)struct the score. The music undecides its

indecisions and a disunified unity is created. The quartet is not so much a static statement of unity or disunity as a process which is always moving towards synthesis. But synthesis is never attained.

6. Discussion

Richard Cohn and Douglas Dempster state that the principal and most persistent canon (in the sense of law or rule) governing our Western aesthetic is that 'successful works of art, including the "masterpieces" of Western art music, exhibit unity, coherence, or "organic" integrity' (Cohn and Dempster 1992, 156). And as Fred Everett Maus noted in 1999: 'Musical analysis usually tries to display musical unity. The goal may be stated overtly … or it may be inexplicit, though obvious.' (Maus 1999, 171.) However, as Maus also notes, perhaps the concept of unity has been unclear: 'Perhaps we do not always know what we mean by "musical unity"' (ibid.). In this essay, we have hitherto witnessed a number of ways of understanding unity in five Anglo-American musicological or music-theoretical articles on Beethoven's Op. 132, first movement, published between 1987 and 2009.

Concerning the unity of the surface of the first movement of Beethoven's Op. 132, Kofi Agawu (1991, 112) noted that the surface is dominated by extreme contrast. He identified the topics and offered a verbal description of the events taking place in the exposition. Agawu did find the surface highly significant, although he could not find that the surface would signify anything coherent. Rather, he found that defective enactments of a familiar construct, the circle of fifths, granted the movement relative coherence on the subsurface level (Agawu 1991, 120–1). Drawing upon Agawu's conclusions, Susan McClary (2000, 119–21) suggested that the exposition comprised 'a random assortment of *topoi* littering the surface.' For her, '[f]ew pieces offer so vivid an image of shattered subjectivity as the opening page of Op. 132' (ibid., 119). In the end, for McClary, the fragments of the first movement acquired meaning as a table of contents for the subsequent movements (ibid., 124).

As regards unity of form, all writers identified a certain similarity with sonata form in the first movement of Op. 132. However, there was a general resistance among analysts to take a clear stance about the formal layout of the movement. It seemed to be easier to keep the conversation on a meta-level, to talk about the problem of naming different parts of the sonata scheme, rather than getting to grips with

definitive answers. Agawu (1991, 118–120) claimed that it was unimportant how one chooses to label the individual sections of the movement 'so long as one grasps the logic of tonal relations.' McClary (2000, 124) preferred 'to think of the movement as composed of three attempted expositions.' Samarotto (2009, 23) noted aptly that the piece is inevitably in some kind of sonata form, but the material that informs it is too conflicted to support that scheme. The analysts' refusal to label individual parts of the sonata scheme might be disturbing for someone seeking definitive answers. On the other hand, it might be more conceivable to discuss formal problems than to come up with ready-made solutions, which are likely to be insufficient, inefficient and inadequate for the music at hand. Wallace (1989, 9) suggested that Beethoven might have deliberately created an unstable form 'in order to impress the listener with the possibility of divergent expressive interpretations.' Eventually, the idea of deliberate unstability casted a shadow upon the whole unity debate. It was no longer seen as supportable to automatically try to understand Beethoven's work as a unified composition. Rather, the work was seen as intentionally disunified. Perhaps Beethoven's unstable form is a result of his dramaturgical wit and cunning in the play with the listener's expectations, in the same way as it has been suggested Mozart and Haydn play craftily with our expectations?

As regards the unity of subsurface, it was shown how different theories of subsurface continuity granted relative coherence to the movement as a whole. Agawu's circle of fifths is a theoretical concept, an attempt at making sense of the subsurface level, although none of his circles was ever complete. However, the listener's alleged familiarity with the construct was supposed to guarantee its perceptual significance (Agawu 1991, 121). Agawu's emphasis on conflicts and irresolvable dilemmas was supplemented by Samarotto's (2009, 23) view that the music is 'conflicted to its core'. Wallace (1989, 15) suggested that 'the expressive and structural elements do not conflict; they are literally one and the same'. According to Wallace, the complexity of the emotional content makes it unlikely that two listeners will hear the music in exactly the same manner. Therefore, Beethoven chose to capitalize on this fact by making the music deliberately ambiguous in as many ways as possible. Wallace (ibid., 16–17) suggested that the unique content of Op. 132's is an assertion that an emotional message—although impossible to objectively verify—is nevertheless significant and may generate 'strength and assurance rather than

confusion'. Perhaps this emphasis on 'strength and assurance rather than confusion' is one way of making sense of the non-sensible.

Regarding motivic unity, Chua (1995, 83) viewed Beethoven's Op. 132 as an 'impure mixture of seemingly immiscible elements—unity and disunity together'. Why is motivic integration so important? Is it perhaps so, that when everything else fails, a four-note cell at the beginning of the piece remains the only thing to hold on to? Motivic integration, Chua writes, is one of those 'processes at work, which cause an entire piece to unfold with a logic that creates the peculiarities of the score' (ibid., 5). The fact that Chua argues with an equally convincing tone for the disunity of the work as for the unity of the same, and his emphasis on the dialectical opposites in the quartet—past and present, sacred and profane and so on—gives us reason to assume that Chua also thinks of the work as being deliberately ambiguous.

Ideas and unities

What kind of unities have been perceived in Beethoven's Op. 132? A unity of conflict is a common feature of both Agawu and Samarotto. McClary sees the surface as utterly fragmented. Wallace suggests that the work is deliberately ambiguous in as many ways as possible. And Chua advocates a view of the work as simultaneously unified and disunified. When it all comes around, all analyses are based on the assumption that there is logic of some kind in the work and this logic can be recognised and discerned. This is related to Morgan's (2003, 27) fundamental premise for musical analysis: analysis is based on the assumption that music makes sense.

Maus (1999, 184) listed a variety of words and expressions associated with musical unity: 'coherence', 'completeness', 'comprehensiveness', 'fusion', 'integrity', 'integration', 'logic', 'organic unity', 'perfection', 'self-sufficiency', 'synthesis', 'totality', 'wholeness', and so on. We now see that several of these attributes have been used in the five writers' commentaries on the unity of Beethoven's Op. 132: there is coherence and incoherence, integrity and integration, logic, synthesis and self-sufficiency. In addition to Maus's attributes, the work has been seen as ambiguous, disunified, disjunctive, and discontinuous. The most important argument concerns coherence: the 'bewildered' surface is a threat to coherence, theories of subsurface

continuity grant relative coherence to the piece, Beethoven's compositional process borders on incoherence, and so forth.

Susan McClary (2000) is the one writer willing to go furthest in suggesting that Beethoven's music, in Op. 132, borders on incoherence. Through her notions of the postmodern subject, the surface as a random assortment of apparently unrelated *topoi* and the inconsequential playing with signs (ibid., 125), she has challenged many musicologists' understanding of late Beethoven. McClary talks of Beethoven as almost insane: 'We may be witnessing the rantings of a madman' (ibid., 122). Nevertheless, she also suggests a variety of ways, in which we may make sense of the music: for instance, through its historical references and through seeing the different ideas in the beginning as constituting a rough table of contents for the quartet as a whole. In her reading, McClary draws to a large extent on what Kerman and Agawu say, but her critique becomes most valuable and controversial when she brings in her own notion of the postmodern surface which exists for its own sake (ibid., 125). All references to historical styles and an orderly social world with religious and military associations add up to the impression of shattered subjectivity. Certainly, a problem with many readings of McClary is that she is being interpreted far too literally (see, for instance, Hatten 2004 and Spitzer 2006). As Hatten remarks about McClary's interpretation:

> in attempting to turn Beethoven into a skeptic with respect to the vitality of conventions, and in viewing Op. 132 as a step on the way to the postmodern splintering of subjectivity, [McClary] has moved beyond historical reconstruction to a present-day appropriation of Beethoven. (Hatten 2004, 277.)

Hatten may be right in criticising McClary for a present-day appropriation of Beethoven—her notion of the postmodern subject is, indeed, ahistorical—but McClary should be appreciated for bringing about new ideas. And, as McClary stated already in the preface, her intention was never to present any ready-made truths but to 'toss different ideas into the ring,' to air ideas somewhat sketchily:

> I have chosen to retain as much as possible the discursive quality of the original lectures [on which this book is made]. Although I have expanded the texts of the five

hour-long talks a bit, I wanted to maintain the sense of interconnection among the chapters rather than allowing each to become the book-length study it obviously deserves. But I hope the ideas that emerge from my assemblage will justify its odd juxtapositions and compensate for its more-than-occasional sketchiness.
(McClary 2000, xii.)

Unity and analysis

Morgan (2003, 27) contended that analysis is based on the assumption that music makes sense. No matter how disunified the analysts initially perceived the work, all analysts, in the end, revealed underlying structures which granted the work coherence and logic, at least on some level, with regard to some parameter: harmony, expression, dramaturgy, to name but a few. Speaking about the search for unity in musical analysis, Morgan (2003, 23) also stated that 'a focus on unity … exaggerates the integrity of the whole, making us blind to inconsistencies and discontinuities that would emerge under less restrictive interpretative rubrics.' Having discussed in detail five articles dealing with unity—or the lack thereof—we can under no circumstances conclude that the present writers would have closed their eyes to inconsistencies or discontinuities. Rather, the inconsistencies and discontinuities were treated with due respect.

Morgan is right in saying that to claim that a composition lacks unity necessarily silences the analyst (ibid., 27). However, none of the five writers claimed that Beethoven's Op. 132 lacked unity. What they claimed was that some parts of the work were disunified. Correspondingly, some parts were unified, at least on some level. More importantly, when the work seemed discontinuous or disunified, there was often a reason for it. Hence, Morgan's 2003 call for an analysis showing that the disunity itself is meaningful had been answered—fourteen years earlier—by Wallace (1989) who suggested Beethoven's composition is deliberately—that is, intentionally—ambiguous.

Chua's (1995, 9) conclusions on the suitability of Beethoven's late quartets to (systematic) analysis are far-reaching. He is right in saying that there can be no systematic method of analysing Beethoven's late quartets, since they constantly

undermine analysis and challenge all analytical systems and analysts. Also, his own self-reflecting and ironic remark on his 'calligraphic patterns' is a case in point: 'What is significant is what lies outside the graphs. Is it not strange that they deal only with pitches?' (Chua 1995, 81.) This raises important questions about our analytical tools: How important is pitch for musical analysis, and for the overall impression of a musical work in the first place, relative to rhythm, dynamics and timbre? As long as our analytical tools are dominated by pitch-centered methods such as Shenkerian analysis, we will continue to seek unities primarily based on pitch.

Historical observations

The material analysed here is not suitable for making judgements of historical development, specifically for two reasons: the number of articles within the time period of 22 years being too small, and the articles representing distinctly different analytical traditions. However, a few general historical observations can be made. First, the discussion about the sonata form of the movement shows perhaps most clearly how musicological research has moved away from pinpointing readily identifiable elements of form towards embracing the ambiguous and disunified. The analysts' refusal to identify conventional sonata-form sections is perhaps, more than anything, a postmodern phenomenon. Second, it has become commonplace to mix Schenkerian analysis with other analytical methods, such as new musicology and literary theory (McClary), aspects of temporal and formal analysis (Samarotto), dramaturgical interpretation (Wallace), semiotic methodology (Agawu) and custom-made analytical tools (Chua).

Kevin Korsyn has argued that the discourses in historical musicology, ethnomusicology and music theory tend to be more isolated and exclusive these days than before: 'Like gears that do not mesh, their discourses cannot engage each other' (Korsyn 2003, 6). With the present results at hand, I, however, find that the musicological and music-theoretical discourses have come surprisingly close to each other. Coming from such different scholarly traditions, the five writers did manage to engage in a successful and rich debate over issues of unity in Beethoven's Op. 132. Although the musicological and music-theoretical traditions are in some respects

different, differences can be bridged and overcome. Discourses can engage in dialogue.

All in all, the present writers' positive attitude towards embracing the ambiguous and disunified in Beethoven's Op. 132 can be related to some greater changes in the Anglo-American musicological field of the past 30 years: first, a widening of the field in general, second, Adorno's texts becoming available in English translations to an English-speaking public, and last, partly due to the two aforementioned events, a turn towards accepting if not embracing the ambiguous and disunified, disrupted and incoherent in musicology in general. It may be called a symptom of the postmodern age that a musical work may these days be seen as deliberately ambiguous or intentionally disunified. However, compared with earlier accounts of the alleged unity of Beethoven's late quartets (see, for instance, Cooke 1963), this constitutes a remarkable shift in discourse. Unity does no longer exist in the musical work but in the perceiver's mind. It is of secondary importance to the work, but of primary importance to our understanding of it. The shift is not only a shift in emphasis, but a paradigmatic one.

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