

Analysing the Unanalysable

An analytical approach to Schoenberg's The Obligatory Recitative¹

In musicological literature, *The Obligatory Recitative*, Schoenberg's final orchestral piece from his Op. 16 cycle, is reputed for its unanalysability. After revisiting Adorno's concept of a *musique informelle*, and after comparing several analytical strategies that have been used to approach this music, this article endeavours to draw the outlines of a new analytical strategy. By combining a 'top-down' with a 'bottom-up' approach within the overall framework of Schoenberg's own analytical techniques, this strategy hopes to gain a renewed access to the piece.

I

In a 1927 special issue of the Viennese conductors' journal *Pult und Taktstock*, devoted to 'Arnold Schoenberg and his orchestral works', Theodor W. Adorno published the first extensive study on the Five Orchestral Pieces, Op. 16 (1909). About *The Obligatory Recitative*, the final piece from the cycle, he writes that it is 'completely dissolved in the form, bound only by the basic figures [*Grundgestalten*] and the constant primacy of an 'obligatory' *Hauptstimme*, wandering from one instrument to the other'.² He then proceeds – rather unsuccessfully – to try to identify the 'main figure [*Hauptgestalt*] of the piece', and concludes his brief discussion of *The Obligatory Recitative* stating that 'every attempt to describe its [the main figure's] inexhaustible transformations must be abandoned here'.

Such treatment of *The Obligatory Recitative* would remain somewhat of a constant in the musicological literature on Schoenberg's *Five Orchestral Pieces*. Whereas the infor-

- 1 The present article is a revised version of a fragment from the author's master's thesis, which deals with the problem of genre in Schoenberg's Five Orchestral Pieces (*Absolut nicht symphonisch, direkt das Gegenteil davon*. Een onderzoek naar de genreproblematiek in de Fünf Orchesterstücke opus 16 van Arnold Schönberg, K.U. Leuven, 2001). The author is a research assistant of the Fund for Scientific Research - Flanders (F.W.O. Vlaanderen). 'The Obligatory Recitative' is Schoenberg's own translation of 'Das obligate Rezitativ', made for a revision of his Op. 16 for slightly reduced orchestra from 1949. It should be preferred to 'The obligato recitative', which is in use as well (e.g. Alan Street, 'The Obligato Recitative: Narrative and Schoenberg's Five Orchestral Pieces, Op. 16', in: Anthony Pople (ed.), *Theory, Analysis and Meaning in Music*, Cambridge 1994, pp. 164-183).
- 2 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Arnold Schönberg: Fünf Orchesterstücke Op. 16', in: *Musikalische Schriften V*, (*Gesammelte Schriften*, 18), Frankfurt am Main 1984, pp. 335-344. The discussion of *The Obligatory Recitative* is on pp. 342-343. The essay, which has never been translated in English, was first published in *Pult und Taktstock* 4 (1927), *Sonderheft: Arnold Schönberg und seine Orchesterwerke*, pp. 36-43. The German original reads: 'Das letzte Stück ist in der Form ganz aufgelöst, gebunden allein durch die Grundgestalten und die stetige Vorherrschaft einer 'obligaten' Hauptstimme, die von Instrument zu Instrument wandert. (...) Von jedem Versuch, ihre [der Hauptgestalt] unerschöpflichen Verwandlungen zu beschreiben, muß hier abgesehen werden'.

mation about the first four pieces, concise though it may be, is usually very much *ad rem*, that about the final piece is often evasive and restricted to very general and almost banal considerations: the piece is described as melodic, lyric and very polyphonic. Some authors take recourse to the discussion of peripheral elements, such as Schoenberg's first time ever use of a sign to designate the *Hauptstimme* here,³ while others even avoid a discussion of the piece altogether, and merely stress that the colleagues did not do much of a job either.⁴ Almost all reconcile themselves to the implicit prejudice of the unanalysability of *The Obligatory Recitative*.⁵

II

This capitulation has its origins of course, and even those who will not resign to the supposed unanalysability of the piece, will have to admit that its analysis is extremely problematic and involves other kinds of difficulties than the other pieces do. Unlike the other pieces, *The Obligatory Recitative* is not part of the nineteenth-century formal tradition, and the formal categories that can at least play a heuristic role when analysing Opus 16,1 through 16,4, are irrelevant to Opus 16,5.⁶ The difference between thematic and developmental sections, between stability and instability has blurred to such an extent, that at least in this way it seems no longer possible to generate form. Thus, *The Obligatory Recitative* is part of the same group of compositions to which belong also the last of the *Three Piano Pieces*, Op. 11, *Erwartung*, *Herzgewächse*, the *Four orchestral songs*, Op. 22, and, to a lesser degree, *Die Glückliche Hand*. It is this group of compositions Adorno referred to in his 1961 Darmstadt lecture *Vers une musique informelle*, describing this 'informal music' as 'a music which has cast off all forms that are related to it in an external, abstract, and inflexible way, but which, completely freed from that which is imposed heteronomously and that which is foreign to it, nevertheless is objectively compulsive in

- 3 For example, Egon Wellesz, *Arnold Schönberg* [sic], transl. by W.H. Kerridge, New York 1969, p. 124 (original German edition: *Arnold Schönberg*, Leipzig 1921) and Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, *Schönberg. Leben – Umwelt – Werk*, Zürich/Freiburg im Breisgau 1974, p. 111. In the original version of the score (published by Peters in Leipzig in 1912), the symbol Schoenberg uses is a kind of angular bracket. In the revised 1922 edition, though, it is replaced by the symbol familiar from Schoenberg's twelve-tone scores.
- 4 For instance, Robert Craft, 'Schoenberg's Five Pieces for Orchestra', in: Benjamin Boretz (ed.), *Perspectives on Schoenberg and Stravinsky*, Princeton 1968, pp. 3-24.
- 5 Even in the most recent literature, the treatment of *The Obligatory Recitative* is characterized by a remarkable brevity and a reluctance to go into analytical detail, e.g. Bryan Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg. 1908-1923*, Oxford/New York 2000, and Jonathan Cross, 'Fünf Orchesterstücke op. 16', in: Gerold W. Cruber (ed.), *Arnold Schönberg: Interpretationen seiner Werke*, Laaber 2003, pp. 216-228.
- 6 This is particularly clear in the first two pieces. Traces of the sonata form tradition are very prominent in *Vorgefühle*, which is clearly divided into an exposition (mm. 1-25), a development section (mm. 26-94), and a recapitulation (mm. 95ff), the major difference with a traditional sonata form being the fact that neither the exposition nor the recapitulation seems to contain a contrasting subordinate theme group. *Vergangenes* is an equivalent of a symphonic slow movement, and shares with the latter its only slightly modified ternary form (mm. 1-22: a b a'; mm. 23-76: c d c'; mm. 77-85: simultaneous recapitulation of a and b; mm. 86-92: coda). For a more detailed investigation of the formal organization of especially the first of Schoenberg's Five Orchestral Pieces, I refer to my forthcoming article "'Absolut nicht symphonisch'? Schönbergs Fünf Orchesterstücke und die Gattungskonventionen der Symphonie", which will appear in *Musik und Ästhetik* (Autumn 2004).

the phenomenon, and does not constitute itself in these external laws.⁷ 'Informal', of course, does not mean 'without form, amorphous', but rather 'anti-formalistic' or, even better, 'anti-formulaic'. Adorno means a music that does not derive its form from conventional formulae imposed to it, but that develops its form from within itself. It is not conceived from the global, but from the local formal level.

In *Philosophy of Modern Music* (*Philosophie der neuen Musik*, 1949), Adorno writes about *Erwartung*: 'The seismographic registration of traumatic shocks becomes (...) the technical structural law of music. This formal principle forbids continuity and development.'⁸ It seems very attractive to extrapolate this consideration by formulating a formal principle that is valid for the informal music of about 1910 in general. In the way that in *Erwartung* the absence of continuity and development does not result in formlessness, but becomes an alternative formal principle itself, one could consider the conscious negation of traditional formal categories as the central formal idea of all pieces from this work group. In this respect, one feels reminded of athematicism, the opposite of motivic-thematic thinking, and a concept Adorno uses indeed when talking about informal music.

The case, however, is more complicated than that. Hermann Danuser⁹ approaches *The Obligatory Recitative* from the perspective of musical prose, of which the piece is a paradigmatic example. He, too, refers to Adorno, who in the *Minima Moralia* (1951) interprets musical prose as 'strenge Negation des Strengsten' – 'strict negation of the strictest'.¹⁰ The problem now is that musical prose and athematicism do not go together very well: each of both concepts is allied to an entirely opposite interpretation of the historical position of Schoenberg's first atonal compositions. When Schoenberg's move towards atonality in 1908 is considered a radical rupture with tradition, athematicism is a logical next step: after tonality, also thematic-motivic thinking, the second pillar of the nineteenth-century German-Austrian musical tradition is left behind. On the other hand, when one interprets Schoenberg's step towards atonality not as a rupture, but as a consequence of part of the nineteenth-century tradition – the tonal expansion of Liszt and Wagner –, the concept of athematicism becomes hardly tenable. According to this view, Schoenberg counters the definitive loss of tonality as a means of structural organization by putting everything on the other pillar of the nineteenth-century tradition, the motivic-thematic thinking of Beethoven and Brahms. So when atonality is not consid-

7 Th.W. Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle', in *Musikalische Schriften I-III*, Gesammelte Schriften 16, Frankfurt am Main 1978, pp. 493-540, p. 496. No English translation of this essay has been published to date. The German original reads: 'eine Musik, die alle ihr äußerlich, abstrakt, starr gegenüberstehenden Formen abgeworfen hat, die aber, vollkommen frei vom heteronom Auferlegten und ihr Fremden, doch objektiv zwingend im Phänomen, nicht in diesen auswendigen Gesetzmäßigkeiten sich konstituiert'. The version of the essay in the *Gesammelte Schriften* differs slightly from the original lecture, which was published in *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik* 1961, Mainz 1962, pp. 73-102.

8 Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, transl. by Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster, London 1973, p. 42. The German original (*Gesammelte Schriften* 12, Frankfurt am Main, 1975, p. 47) reads: 'Die seismographische Aufzeichnung traumatischer Schocks wird (...) das technische Formgesetz der Musik. Es verbietet Kontinuität und Entwicklung'.

9 Hermann Danuser, *Musikalische Prosa* (Studien zur Musikgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts 46), Regensburg 1975, p. 137.

10 Th.W. Adorno, *Minima moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Gesammelte Schriften 4), Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 250. A translation in English exists (*Minima Moralia. Reflections from the Damaged Life*, transl. by Edmund F.N. Jephcott, London 1974), but could not be consulted.

ered a rupture with tonality, but rather a consequence of the harmonic innovations of the nineteenth century, its correlate is not athematicism, but motivic-thematic through-organization. In the wake of this follows musical prose, a syntax in which everything that does not contribute to the motivic-thematic organization is eliminated.

Thus, the difficulty of defining motivic-thematic relationships in *The Obligatory Recitative* is not due to their absence, but – quite on the contrary – to an extreme motivic integration, which establishes relationships that are so dense and numerous that they scarcely have analytical relevance. For analytical practice, it does not matter whether everything or nothing is interrelated. Only after this reflection the concept of athematicism can be taken up again: as the utmost motivic-thematic through-organization that has turned into its opposite. Adorno of course recognized the dialectics of the situation, when he wrote about *Erwartung* that 'the athematic fibre of the monodrama positively sublates the spirit of motivic-thematic labour in itself'.¹¹ This means that the informal music is very likely to contain fossils of traditional formal categories, which are sublated – *aufgehoben* – in it, in the double Hegelian sense of cancelling and maintaining.

III

Although such fossils are not entirely meaningless to an analysis of Schoenberg's 'musique informelle', they do not offer enough hold to function as an analytical starting-point. As a consequence, the few analysts who have tackled *The Obligatory Recitative* or other informal pieces more or less successfully have sought other approaches to this music.

Analysing the third of the Op. 11 piano pieces, Rheinhold Brinkmann¹² developed the concept of *Satzzonen*. Already the first piece contains at least one fragment (mm. 12-17) that seems to contrast to its environment to such an extent that it becomes exterritorial.¹³ The third piece though entirely consists of such isolated *Satzzonen*: it is nothing but a sequence of rather short segments that stand on their own. Segments are never repeated or recapitulated, and there are no melodic interrelationships. The strategy Brinkmann uses to analyse this music can be summarized as follows: (1) demarcation of the zones, (2) analysis and characterization of each separate zone, (3) investigation of the connection of two successive zones, (4) grouping the zones into larger units and, when possible, interpretation of the form that emerges out of this.

Adapting this strategy to *The Obligatory Recitative* implies two problems, though. First, the demarcation of the zones may be rather self-evident in Op. 11,3 (as it is in *Erwartung*¹⁴), but in Op. 16,5 it is hampered by the fact that the texture is one of per-

11 Th.W. Adorno, 'Vers une musique informelle', p. 515. German original: 'die athematische Fiber des Monodrams hebt den Geist motivisch-thematischer Arbeit positiv in sich auf.'

12 Rheinhold Brinkmann, *Arnold Schönberg: Drei Klavierstücke Op. 11. Studien zur frühen Atonalität bei Schönberg* (Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft 7), Wiesbaden 1969, pp. 109-129.

13 Mm. 12-17 contrast in every respect to the almost Brahmsian small ternary that immediately precedes them. The contrast is somewhat mitigated, however, by the transition in mm. 15-17, which links the fragment to the continuation of the piece, as well as by the fact that in the further course of the piece, several elements from mm. 12-14 are integrated into the overall context. Compare R. Brinkmann, *Arnold Schönberg: Drei Klavierstücke Op. 11*, pp. 80-86, and Mark Delaere, *Funktionelle Atonalität. Analytische Strategien für die frei-atonale Musik der Wiener Schule* (Veröffentlichungen zur Musikforschung 14), Wilhelmshaven 1993, pp. 121-122.

14 See for instance Elmar Budde, 'Arnold Schönbergs Monodram Erwartung – Versuch einer Analyse der ersten Szene', in: *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 36 (1979), pp. 1-20.

manent transition. Another, more serious problem than this first one – which is in fact hardly a problem, but a mere inconvenience – is that analyses taking the principle of *Satzzonen* as a starting point often tend to restrict themselves to the description of isolated segments. They indeed often fail to transcend a local analysis, so that in relation to the global form, they do not get much further than very general conclusions.

In his bulky volume on Schoenberg's works from the years 1907-1909 and 1920-1924, Jan Maegaard¹⁵ approaches *The Obligatory Recitative* rather from the global level, the level the analytical strand initiated by Brinkmann's study tended to neglect. Maegaard tries to deduce a formal principle from the development of the *Hauptstimme*. To this effect, he isolates this *Hauptstimme* – a melody, passed on through the entire orchestra and spanning from the first to the last bar – from the rest of the very polyphonic texture, and abstracts the *Hauptstimme* itself from instrumentation, rhythm, and phrasing. An exclusive analysis of the diastematic aspect of the *Hauptstimme* leads Maegaard to the conclusion that the piece consists of three curves, mm. °1-33,¹⁶ 32-79 and 80-136, all describing analogous patterns. Each of them starts in the middle register, goes up to a preliminary high point (mm. 5, 49 and 84, respectively), falls down to a preliminary deep point, rises again to a definitive climax (mm. 24, 64 and 110), and finally falls to a deep point again.

Maegaard's analysis, however, also has some problems to it. The minor problem would seem that beginnings and endings of the curves are positioned rather inaccurately and somewhat arbitrarily.¹⁷ It would seem to be possible to put this defect right by simply reapplying Maegaard's strategy to the piece, and doing it better than he did.¹⁸ However, Maegaard's analytical premise – the isolation of the *Hauptstimme* and the priority of its diastematic aspect – is most problematic itself. Maegaard sees the *Hauptstimme* as one single uninterrupted melody, wandering through the piece from the beginning to the end. Obviously, this point of view is stimulated by the piece's title, which seems to imply an analogy to the soloist's vocal line and the instrumental accompaniment in an operatic recitative. Apart from the fact that it is all but evident to construe the very melodic style of Schoenberg's final orchestral piece as that of a recitative, however, Carl Dahlhaus¹⁹ has rightly argued that the 'obligatory recitative' is not a formal, but an aesthetic concept. It refers to the idea of music as a wordless language, and thus excludes any formal and superficial analogy to a recitative. Although Maegaard has a point in that the melodic course of the *Hauptstimme* plays a role in the design of the piece, it seems unwise to keep both the other voices and the non-diastematic parameters of the main voice out of the analysis.

15 Jan Maegaard, *Studien zur Entwicklung des dodekaphonen Satzes bei Arnold Schönberg*, Copenhagen 1972, *Analytischer Teil*, pp. 278-285.

16 The symbol '°' signifies 'with upbeat'.

17 For instance, it is not entirely clear why Maegaard positions the beginning of the second curve in m. 32, that is, before the end of curve 1. Admittedly, it is remarkable that there is a two-part *Hauptstimme* in these bars, but the upper part in mm. 32-33 is totally unconnected to mm. 34ff. If the beginning of a second curve is to be located here somewhere, m. 34 seems a much more plausible spot than m. 32. In a similar way, it is unclear why the third curve begins in m. 80, and not in m. °78.

18 This is realized quite successfully in the concise but very solid analysis by Michael Mäckelmann, *Arnold Schönberg. Fünf Orchesterstücke Op. 16* (Meisterwerke der Musik 45), Munich 1987, pp. 43-48.

19 Carl Dahlhaus, "Das obligate Rezitativ", in: *Schönberg und Andere. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Neuen Musik*, Mainz 1978, pp. 184-188. An English translation (as "The Obligato Recitative") can be found in Dahlhaus, *Schoenberg and the New Music*, transl. by Derrick Puffet and Alfred Clayton, Cambridge 1987, pp. 144-148.

The best chances of a successful interpretation of *The Obligatory Recitative* will be offered by an analysis combining the best of both approaches, which thus can test and correct the results of the analysis of the global formal course by that of the local level. Since informal music is defined as music that is conceived from the local level, premise should be that the interpretation of the global form has to be considered incorrect as long as it contradicts what happens at the local level.

IV

In spite of the difficulties that have been mentioned, a number of caesurae in *The Obligatory Recitative* can be defined, which divide the piece into ten sections of various lengths. The caesurae are located using five criteria: (1) the presence of real breaks (rests), (2) melodic gestures that signalize endings (typically cadential rhythms, decreasing motion, etc.) and/or new beginnings (upbeats, increasing rhythmic activity...), (3) dynamic contrast, (4) textural contrast (e.g. density), (5) contrast in instrumentation. Of course, each of these criteria occurs separately at numerous places in the score, but practically every caesura is characterized by the simultaneous occurrence of at least three of them; it is only at the last caesura, between sections 9 and 10 (m. 120), that less than three criteria can be indicated. The beginning of the final section is clearly marked, however, by the striking staccato chords of the piccolos, flutes, celesta and harp in mm. 120-121. Table 1 shows an overview of the sections and caesurae, and mentions the criteria used to locate each caesura.²⁰

The treatment of the *Hauptstimme* permits a division of the ten sections in two categories. In a first group (sections 1, 2, 4, 6 and 9), the *Hauptstimme* is a real 'melody': its continuity is never interrupted and it is passed on between different instruments either in contiguous motion or by means of hinge-tones. A clear example is section 1 (mm. °1-17). The melody, which is played by the oboes and violas at first, is taken over by the clarinet in m. 2, at which point the violas double the first note of the clarinet. The entrance of the first violins in m. 6 coincides with a leap of an augmented fourth, but is prepared by the violas, which double the a# of the clarinet in mm. 5-6. When the *Hauptstimme* is taken over by the cellos in m. 7, their first note is doubled by the last one of the first violins. In mm. 9 (cello – flute) and 11 (flute – clarinet), the melody is passed on without hinge-tones, but both times the interval is a minor second (contingent motion). Only when the horn takes over the *Hauptstimme* at the end of m. 15, this is not tempered by means of an overlap or contingent motion (the interval is that of a major seventh), but this might plausibly be interpreted as an announcement of the end of the first section. The *Hauptstimme* in sections 2, 4, 6 and 9 is organized in a very similar way.

In sections 3, 5, 8 and 10, on the other hand, the *Hauptstimme* is treated in a completely different way. The 'melody' is fragmented by many rests and it is passed on without hinge-tones or contiguous motion. Often rests and changes in instrumentation even coincide. It would be an exaggeration to state that sections 1, 2, 4, 6 and 9 are melodic, whereas the others are motivic, since motivic development is very intense in both groups. But clearly, there are two different types of shaping a melody at work in *The Obligatory Recitative*, one continuous, the other discontinuous.

20 One might be inclined to argue for the presence of yet another caesura in m. 116, because of the rests in the *Hauptstimme*. As we will see later on, however, mm. °95-116 and 117-120 belong together functionally.

section 1: mm. ^a 1-17	<i>caesura 1 (m. 17): 2, 3, 4, 5</i>
section 2: mm. ^a 18-28	<i>caesura 2 (mm. 28-29): 1, 2, 3, 4, 5</i>
section 3: mm. 29-40	<i>caesura 3 (mm. 40-41): 2, 4, 5</i>
section 4: mm. 41-50	<i>caesura 4 (m. 51): 3, 4, 5</i>
section 5: mm. 51-55	<i>caesura 5 (m. 55): 2, 4, 5</i>
section 6: mm. ^a 56-65a	<i>caesura 6 (m. 65): 3, 4, 5</i>
section 7: mm. 65b-69	<i>caesura 7 (m. 70): 1, 3, 4, 5</i>
section 8: mm. 70-94a	<i>caesura 8 (m. 94): 2, 4, 5</i>
section 9: mm. 94b-120	<i>caesura 9: (m. 120): 1, 5</i>
section 10: mm. ^a 121-136	

Table 1

Overview of the sections and caesura in *The Obligatory Recitative*.

The division of the sections into two categories becomes analytically relevant when both categories prove to alternate regularly. Apart from sections 1 and 7,²¹ every continuous section (2, 4, 6 and 9) is followed by a discontinuous one (3, 5, 8 and 11). That being so, it seems as though the piece is to be divided into five rather than three parts (as both Maegaard and Mäckelmann supposed): section 1 – sections 2-3 – sections 4-5 – sections 6-(7)-8 – sections 9-10. All continuous sections except section 1 begin with a large-scale *crescendo* and end *forte* or louder, whereas the discontinuous mostly remain under the *forte*-limit.²² In other words, four in five sections describe a similar pattern of gradual increase – climax – decrease. At this point of the analysis, Maegaard's idea of melodic high points can be brought into play again. The highest notes of all continuous sections (e^3 in section 2, $e^{\sharp 3}$ in section 4, a^3 in section 6, $f^{\sharp 4}$ in section 9) coincide with the dynamic climaxes (respectively m. 24, m. 49, m. 64 and mm. 110ff). Dynamically ($f-f-ff-fff$) as well as melodically ($e^3-e^{\sharp 3}-a^3-f^{\sharp 4}$), there is an overarching climax.

In order to fully weaken the prejudice that *The Obligatory Recitative* is unanalysable, it has to be demonstrated that the motivic-thematic dimension of the piece answers to a certain logic as well. Michael Mäckelmann²³ has suggested that, at least as far as the *Hauptstimme* is concerned, it is possible to explain every note from the constant metamorphosis of one model (the first three bars of the *Hauptstimme*). As was said before,

21 Although section 7 cannot be said to be discontinuous, because the *Hauptstimme* is uninterruptedly played by the flutes and the first violins (and later by the first clarinet as well), it is not really continuous either, because, in contrast to the continuous sections, the *Hauptstimme* does not have the character of a melody here. In fact, section 7 can best be described as a 'sonic field' (*Klangfeld*).

22 The sole exception is section 3, in which some parts are isolated from the global *piano* environment by means of a *forte*.

23 Mäckelmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47.

though, such an analysis would hardly be illuminating. It seems more interesting to proceed in a more selective way, by investigating whether the parallelism between the last four parts of *The Obligatory Recitative* is reflected on the motivic-thematic level.



Example 1

The Obligatory Recitative, mm. °1-2 (*Hauptstimme*).

In the first two bars of the first section, the *Hauptstimme* introduces two motivic elements (Example 1): a falling minor second (x) and a rising five-note motive (y). Both motives are immediately subject to a process of developing variation. In m. 3, x has changed into a falling minor third – although it has been displaced metrically, the motive remains unchanged rhythmically – and in m. 4, y is repeated. The final interval of y is enlarged to a perfect fifth and its last note is at the same time the first one of a new variant of motive x (m. 5), which has been altered melodically (it has turned into a rising major third now) as well as rhythmically. Whereas the first few odd notes of the zigzagging line of the first violins in mm. 6-7 clearly derive from x, the even notes can be considered a development of motive y, shortened further still, the last note of which again overlaps with the first one of motive x in its original intervallic shape (mm. 7-8). In the further course of the piece, this developmental process is taken up exclusively in those sections that have been designated as melodically continuous. It is even more remarkable that the reference to the two central motives x and y is most explicit at the dynamic and melodic climaxes. In m. 22, for example, just before the climax of section 2 (m. 22), the clarinets clearly play a variant of y, which is immediately followed by a repetition of the first variant of x (falling minor third in the original rhythm – compare to m. 3). In m. 24, the clarinets first repeat the diastematic content of m. °1-3, but from the fifth note onwards, the *Hauptstimme* continues with a new variant of y and finally leads to a new motive (z, m. 25). At the climax of section 4 (mm. 48-50), the *Hauptstimme* consists of a somewhat vague reference to motive y (m. 48) and a clear variant of motive x (mm. 49-50). In section 6, the *Hauptstimme* is based on a condensation process on a motive derived from a variant of y (mm. °56-57), which culminates, in mm. 64-65, in the rhythm of motive z.



Example 2

The Obligatory Recitative, mm. °56-65 (*Hauptstimme*).

Finally, section 9 links up with section 6. Over some kind of condensation process (mm. 99-101) it leads towards a long-held climax, in which motive *z* is fully expanded (mm. 102-105). Then, reference is made to material that has been related mostly to the discontinuous sections, and finally (mm. 111-113) a variant of motive *x* is quoted unambiguously.

In the melodically discontinuous sections, a certain regularity concerning the used material is recognizable as well. Compare for example the *Hauptstimme* from sections 3 and 10. It most probably originates in section 1, more exactly in the somewhat dancing motive of the flute in mm. 9-10. The function of section 1 as a whole is that of an exposition. Not only does it supply the principal material that is developed in the following sections – even if this developmental process is difficult to systematize –, it is also a standard to which the continuity or discontinuity of the other sections is measured.

Table 2 shows a formal overview of *The Obligatory Recitative*, summarizing some of the results of this brief analysis.

exposition (mm. °1-17)	section 1: continuous	
arch 1 (mm. °18-40)	section 2: continuous	intensification – climax m. 24 (<i>f</i> , <i>e</i> ³)
	section 3: discontinuous	decrease
arch 2 (mm. 41-55)	section 4: continuous	intensification – climax m. 49 (<i>f</i> , <i>e</i> ^{#3})
	section 5: discontinuous	decrease
arch 3 (mm. °56-94a)	section 6: continuous	intensification – climax m. 64 (<i>ff</i> , <i>a</i> ³)
	section 7	decrease
	section 8: discontinuous	
arch 4 (mm. 94b-135)	section 9: continuous	intensification – climax mm. 110ff (<i>fff</i> , <i>f</i> ^{#4})
	section 10: discontinuous	rapid decrease

Table 2

Formal overview of *The Obligatory Recitative*.

V

The analytical strategy applied here goes consciously against the grain of the music it is analysing. Contrary to the music itself, it does take the analysis of the global level as a starting point, and tries to corroborate the results of this analysis by a detailed and selective discussion of aspects of the local level. In order not to lose oneself in the abundance of potential analytical information, it is important to approach the music with the eyes half-closed, so to say. Only when this – paradoxically – has made the piece's contours clearer, the analyst should open his eyes fully.

Of course, the above discussion of Schoenberg's *Obligatory Recitative* could not possibly pretend to be a self-sufficient analysis, let alone one of the supposedly unanalysable. It does prove, however, that this kind of music can be discussed in analytical terms, and need not be handled in the vague and evasive ways it has been in most – not all! – of the literature up to now. It may have brought together the important elements that might allow, and possibly even stimulate, a renewed analytical interest in this and other pieces.

It may also have indicated in what direction that discussion might go. And some day this may eventually lead to what this discussion was as yet unable to do: analyse the unanalysable.