

## Why I am not a Schenkerian

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### Defining Schenkerism

In the world of music theory, Schenkerism causes something like a religious divide. For some the ideas of Heinrich Schenker constitute the most profound and comprehensive theory of tonal music; others reject them as a negation of common sense and musical understanding. In between the orthodox and the unbelievers stand the liberals and pragmatists. The last may hold little of the truth claims of the theory, but find its principles useful in analytic practice.

The pragmatist attitude implies that a fundamental debate is futile. To me it seems a necessity: if music theory is cultivated on relativist islands, it is doomed to irrelevance, a pastime for academic hobbyists. Generally, musicologists tend to study what they like, and to avoid what they consider aesthetically or scientifically objectionable. Well-founded ‘refutations’ of Schenkerism are scarce.<sup>1</sup> For the unbelievers, studying Schenkerian writing is a hard walk: rather like an atheist reading theology, one stumbles over one counter-intuitive judgment after another, with no rewarding vista at the end of the road. Thwarted intuitions are no argument against a theory: every major scientific advance has involved just that. The insight afforded by a Schenkerian analysis seems however unfit to win over those who doubt its foundations; and the reasoning involved does not qualify as science.<sup>2</sup> Though I remain uncharmed by Schenkerism, the phenomenon of clashing opinions in itself is worthy of study. If a theory strikes many as not just dubious, but irrational – how is it possible that a great number of presumably competent theorists consider it valid and insightful? Evidently, the disagreement goes beyond technicalities: it involves principles of aesthetic, epistemological and ontological nature.

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<sup>1</sup> The most cogent, though summary critique I have found in several writings by Carl Dahlhaus (see references); most famous are cursory remarks in Rosen (1971) and Meyer (1956 and later works); Narmour’s substantial critique (1977), out of Meyer’s ‘school’, suffers from the weaknesses of his competing theory; Kerman (1980) fights in my view a windmill ‘positivism’, though I share his critique of Schenkerian analysis; Golab and Hirszenberg (1988) take Dahlhaus’ viewpoint, but do not probe deeply into Schenkerian reasoning; Eybl (1996) focuses on the arbitrariness and imperceptibility of the *Urlinie*.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 35 below.

I will not argue that Schenkerism is a religious belief. But it seems to depend on a disposition to believe which is cognitively similar to that determining forms of religious belief. Schenkerism is often spoken of in terms derived from religion – *orthodoxy, fundamentalism, zeal, dogmatism, disciples*<sup>3</sup> – and not only by the most ardent adversaries (though such language might be censored in the current political climate). For its originator, religion and aesthetics were welded. Schenker saw himself as a prophet, the sole true interpreter of a near-lost language. His initiates still keep up a mystery cult atmosphere, praising the prophet in what looks to the outsider like a ritual of obligatory laudations.

All the same, many Schenkerians will admit that Schenker is his own worst advocate. He did not present his theory as such, as a coherent and finished conceptual structure, related in a specific way to a body of existing knowledge. Much of it is embedded in a series of didactic works (*Neue musikalische Theorien und Phantasien*, 1906-1935), where his interpretations of conventional wisdom are mingled with his more particular ideas, in various states of development. His already erratic writing is larded with toe-curling, uncontrolled pseudo-philosophical ramblings, punctuated by exclamation marks. Still, some Schenkerians take his every word seriously enough to subject it to endless exegesis; as if a language – music – were better understood by re-interpretation of the interpreter. Even his rhetorical intimidation tactics continues to have effect: in some elementary textbooks Schenker is the only theorist mentioned, in perpetuation of the myth that he alone cast light in the darkness of universal misunderstanding.<sup>4</sup>

Since the 1950's a cleaning up or "*Versachlichung*"<sup>5</sup> has taken place. It has proceeded on the assumption that music theory can be seen as an "autonomous domain":

[...] the main thrust of his work deals with music as an autonomous domain, even to the extent of using musical notation, rather than words, as the primary vehicle of his musical analyses. Therefore his theoretical and analytical ideas are as separable from extramusical issues as is the creative work of a great mathematician from his political affiliations.<sup>6</sup>

It is a misunderstanding that notes, redefined, constitute musical notation (see p. 34 below); also, that such derived 'music' would express anything 'pure', not affected by extramusical beliefs. One great difference between mathematics and music analysis is, evidently, that the latter doesn't offer any *provable* theorems of interest. Instead, it relies on and promotes aesthetic judgments; these are unavoidably tied up with ethics and epistemology. The expatriation of Schenkerians (among them Felix Salzer, Ernst

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3 Some of these terms in Russ (1993), which includes this gem (p. 282): "Rothstein's 'outreach programme' (p.201) – even Rothstein's language cannot avoid the overtones of the born-again Schenkerian – has much of sense in it."

4 For instance, Aldwell and Schachter (1989). The historical perspective in the anglophone world has improved by publications such as Wason (1985).

5 Schwab-Felisch (2005) p. 371; Rothstein (1990) p. 195: "Until the publication of Hellmut Federhofer's recent biography, the most concentrated repository of Schenker's objectionable opinions was probably the infamous Appendix 4 of *Free Composition* [1979], that translation of passages excised either by Oswald Jonas or by Ernst Oster from *Der freie Satz*."

6 Schachter (1988) p. 524

Oster, Oswald Jonas) has no doubt been an important factor in this ‘purification’ process. The curious result has been an Atlantic divide between an institutionalized Schenkerism in the U.S., and marginal resonance in Europe. The ‘Americanization’ of Schenkerism has been aided rather than hampered by the language barrier: it allowed Schenker’s ideas to be filtered by better tempered spokesmen.<sup>7</sup> In the last decades Schenkerism seems to have sufficiently nestled as ‘pure’ theory to open the “Pandora’s box”, to quote Ian Bent, of Schenker’s germanocentric, sexist and elitist socio-political views.

Where this process may lead us in due course is to the realization that every utterance in his theoretical and analytical writings on music is saturated with his ideas in these other realms – that, where his world of ideas is concerned, there are no margins: there is only a single, integrated network of thought. This process may show us that his musical writings cannot fully be understood independently of extramusical reflection.<sup>8</sup>

This makes the task all the more urgent to disclose the more general presuppositions which connect the narrow musical domain with other domains; not in the naïve way of interpreting voice leading as a direct expression of racist or sexist prejudice, but by an investigation of the question *what kinds of concepts* are considered rational, plausible, explanatory, insightful and sensible, or the contrary.

Giving this essay the title it has, I am paying tribute to Bertrand Russell, whose *Why I am not a Christian* (1927) has created something of a controversial *Why I am not ...* tradition. When Russell explained why he was not a Christian, he had to define what the concept should include. He took this rather wide: belief in God, immortality, and “that Christ was the best and wisest of men”.<sup>9</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, maybe, he left out such hard core elements of the Nicene Creed as the Trinity and Redemption. In stating my unbelief in the validity of Schenkerian theory, I will have to establish what is to be considered quintessentially Schenkerian. I think this is the *Ursatz* in some form, not necessarily the one stipulated by Schenker, and the dependent principle of long-range voice leading. These are the most controversial elements, without which Schenkerism would only water down to an eccentric variety of ‘conventional’ theory.

However, one cannot isolate these articles of the Schenkerian creed from a larger body of assumptions in which they are embedded. Considering the quantity and diversity of Schenkerian writing, it is impossible to treat Schenkerism comprehensively; on the other hand it is pointless to isolate one Schenkerian or Schenker himself as a target. I therefore propose to construct for argument’s sake a hypothetical Schenkerism *S*, explicated in a number of theses (rules, hypotheses, dogmas, axioms: depending on one’s interpretation of the nature of the theory). These theses

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7 Benjamin (1981) p. 163: “One reads the text [of *Free Composition*] and begins to wonder if the reason Schenker has had so little influence in Germany is that the Germans have had to cope with the misfortune of being able to read him during all these years.” On the Atlantic divide, see Rothstein (1990) and Schwab-Felisch (2005).

8 In Schenker (1994) p. x

9 Russell (1994) p. 2. The *Why I am not ...* tradition includes for instance Martin Gardner’s rather un-Russellian *The Whys of a philosophical scrivener* (1983).

should be so formulated that they cover most Schenkerian concepts adequately, without being caught in an endless *so says A, but B says ...* parade of authorities. Such a hypothetical reconstruction of Schenkerism will make no attempt at being a closed and coherent formal system. Its purpose is not to function as a theory, but to formulate essential suppositions in a way transparent enough to let the underlying presuppositions shine through, thus showing *where* exactly Schenkerism departs from current ‘mainstream’ theory. In defences of Schenkerism often reference is made to such an alternative body of theory as ‘traditional’ or ‘conventional’. Sometimes rare prejudices are ascribed to this ‘traditional’ theory; sometimes Schenker is credited with the discovery of prior concepts. In fact there is no coherent and commonly accepted non-denominational theory. For comparison, however, a counter-model to *S* might be constructed; let it be called *T*. In this I will formulate what I think is conventional wisdom, filtered through my own commonplace intuitions.

By representing *S* and *T* as a series of numbered propositions, I do not pretend to construct an axiomatic or strictly logical order. The purpose of the numbering is purely heuristic; I will not attempt a logical reconstruction of what may not be logical, to create coherence where there is none. Followed step by step, these propositions should give a rough outline of *S* and *T*. The numbering of the propositions shows corresponding tenets. Since a one-to-one correspondence is not feasible, some numbers will be skipped in *T*. What I consider false attributions to *T* will be indicated as  $\sim T$ . Suppositions which seem to be implied by the views within *S*, but are unlikely to be articulated explicitly by most Schenkerians, will be marked ?*S*. Familiarity with the concepts involved is assumed; formal definitions are not given. The presentation of *S* and *T* will depart from common ground. It therefore does not reflect the inherent structure of the theories in the most obvious way.

## 1. Chords for keys

It is uncontroversially assumed in both *S* and *T* that a classical tonal composition may progress through several key areas, which do not all have the same ‘weight’ or structural importance. The following should therefore (terminology aside) be an unproblematic statement in both *S* and *T*:

*S*1.0 = *T*1.0 Tonality involves an ordering of secondary keys under a main key.

The fact that the piece is ‘in *X*’ means in *T* that (1) departures from the main key are temporary; (2) since keys are not simply juxtaposed, but approached by progressions which are in various ways a result of their relational patterns (‘modulation’), the patterning of keys in a composition is an indirect consequence of the structure of tonality; (3) in this structure some keys are considered ‘near’ and others more ‘distant’, according to some equilibration of three factors: the circle of fifths, diatonic scale degrees and parallel/relative relations; (4) among near keys, special status is usually given to the dominant, subdominant, and (in minor) relative major keys.

Secondary keys are thus embedded in the main key, not as pitch collections, but by a pattern of relations.

In *T*, it is usual to think of secondary keys as graded not only on the basis of their distance to the main key, but also according to degree of cadential confirmation. Weakly confirmed or unconfirmed digressions are transitory between keys which are established with a stronger sense of arrival. The ‘distance’ of secondary keys from the main key constitutes a stylistic background norm; within the individual piece it is rather the degree of confirmation which gives shape to the individual tonal structure, with the main key as a container and reference point for the others. Thus the key scheme of a composition is the product of both the containing hierarchy of *T1.0* and of *T1.1*:

*T1.1* The tonal outline of a composition involves an ordering of weakly confirmed under strongly confirmed keys.

Digressions may of course occur in between keys, in a way which is often not easily categorized.

Contrary to the understanding of some Schenkerians<sup>10</sup>, a key scheme like  $X - Y :// : Y - X$  is not commonly supposed to mean that the piece is “in *X* and then in *Y* and then again in *X*”, but simply “in *X*”, which implies that any secondary key *Y* stands in a certain dependent relation to the main key *X*. While this relation is to some extent predetermined by the stylistic norm, it is given shape in the individual composition: a near key may be made appear distant by circuitous modulation, and a distant key may be brought closer by a less sharp definition of the main key.

~*T* In a tonal composition, an arbitrary succession of keys may be established, concluded by a return to the key of departure.

Since the principal secondary keys can be seen as derived from the principal harmonic degrees in the main key, it is tempting to make the generalizing supposition that key successions are a large scale projection of chord progressions. This does not work; and there is no reason why it should. Keys have an inner coherence through chord syntax, while a chord has identity only by being a harmonic scale degree.<sup>11</sup> The order imposed on key progressions is one created from below, and not a condition for the structure of twelve-tone space. Given keys, tonality is structured by the relations of the keys. Given chords, we need a syntax to shape harmonic tonality. It is of little relevance whether the listener is able to distinguish an ending in the ‘right’ key from one in the ‘wrong’; the principle of tonic return is for the composer to realize rather than for the listener to identify: it constrains key scheme and modulation process in a compositionally rational way. This is not to deny that ‘key awareness’ is an aspect of musical comprehension.

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<sup>10</sup> cf. Salzer (1952) pp. 228–229.

<sup>11</sup> See the more extensive discussion in Dahlhaus (1968) pp. 204–205.

The *T*-concept of key-ordering is hierarchical in a weak sense. It does not answer to a definition of hierarchy as a collection of discrete elements which are linked in only one way to a higher level (“absolute disjointness, requiring immediate subordinacy of each node to exactly one other node”).<sup>12</sup> Modulation is an art of transition, and discreteness is more often avoided than realized.

While the tonal hierarchy is in *T* thus somewhat weakly defined, *S* makes strong assertions. The sounding ‘surface’ of a tonal composition with its various key areas is thought to have been derived, by a layered and regulated transformation (elaboration, diminution), from a simple and uniform ‘background’ (*Ursatz*, or ultimately the triad). Since the concept of hierarchy is so prominent in *S*, it is curious that Schenker and many Schenkerians have objected to the concepts ‘modulation’ and ‘keys’ in the plural. If key *Y* ranks hierarchically below *X*, or rather (*T1.0* and *T1.1*), is ‘contained’ within *X*, within its own level *Y* is, simply, a key. *Y* may also be a mere digression, never cadentially confirmed; then *Y* is no less real, simply less strong; a passing guest who doesn’t take a seat. Schenker’s insistence on the idea of ‘apparent’ or ‘illusory’ keys (*Scheintonarten*) seems to involve a failure to draw full consequences from the hierarchical perspective:

Hierher gehört auch die Frage der Scheintonarten im Vordergrund. Der durch den *Ursatz* verbürgte Zusammenhang des Ganzen offenbart die Kunstwerdung nur eines einzigen Klanges. Also gibt es auch nur die Tonart eben dieses Klanges, so daß, was wir im Vordergrund sonst für Tonarten nehmen, nur Scheintonarten sein können. Die Klänge solcher Scheintonarten sind, da die Baßbrechung der *Ursatz*-formen auch auf die Scheintonarten übertragen wird, innerhalb der neuentstandenen Kadenz gewiß auch Stufen, doch sind diese Stufen im Sinne der nur übertragenen Kadenz für *andersrangig* als die der früheren Schichten zu nehmen. Der Fehler in der Betrachtung der heutigen Theorie besteht also darin, daß die Stufen mechanisch gelesen werden, wodurch aber die Erkenntnis des Zusammenhanges behindert wird.<sup>13</sup>

Since at their level *Stufen* are *Stufen*, why should *Tonart* not be *Tonart*? ‘*Andersrangig*’ does not imply ‘less real’. Leaving aside, for the moment, the *Ursatz* derivation of the key in *S*, the quoted paragraph might be paraphrased in two propositions:

*S1.1.1* Since they are hierarchically subjected to the main key (or ‘the key’), secondary key areas are not keys.

<sup>12</sup> In the systems theory terminology applied by Cohn and Dempster (1992).

<sup>13</sup> Schenker (1935) pp. 173-174 (emphasis originally by spacing); cf. Salzer (1952) p. 230 (playing on the double meaning of ‘tonality’ as *ordered twelve tone space* and *key*): “As structural hearing shows a single tonality with all details in the form of themes, passages, motives, chords etc., as organic expansions of this one tonality, the term modulation to a new key and the resulting conception of themes and passages in different keys become meaningless. Instead of modulation, for instance from F Major to A Major, one should correctly say, ‘progression (or directed motion) from the F-Major to the A-Major chord.’” More critically Schachter (1987) pp. 306-307: “By lumping all ‘keys’ together into a single category, Schenker [in *Der freie Satz*] necessarily treats the subject of modulation in a far less differentiated way than in the *Harmonielehre*, which distinguishes between tonicizations, illusory keys and real modulations. Furthermore, by locating all ‘keys’ at the foreground (‘illusory keys of the foreground’, keys as ‘higher unities in the foreground’, etc.), Schenker minimizes possibly valid distinctions between large-scale, structural modulations and smaller, local ones.”

*S1.1.2* Any departure from the main key is an elaboration of a *Stufe* in that key.

The rejection of keys established within or ‘under’ another key seems to express a deeper presupposition that something cannot function as both one thing and another, at different levels:

*?S1.1.3* A phenomenon cannot be subjected to alternative interpretations. Or:  
The higher hierarchical level is identity-defining.

In an elementary way, this contradicts the very concept of hierarchy. The sergeant is commanded when addressed by the lieutenant, but commander when addressing the private. It is the switch from the first (upward) to the second (downward) which seems to trouble Schenker.<sup>14</sup> It is true that elements in a hierarchy are not exclusively defined by their relations up- and downward (as chords are different in kind from keys). But it remains obscure in what sense secondary keys *are not keys*.

The same ‘upward’ bias extends to chords. In Chopin’s *C-sharp minor Polonaise op. 26: 1*, bar 9, an applied dominant to the subdominant should not be seen as establishing an “independent key” of F-sharp minor.<sup>15</sup> This is no doubt true. From this Schenker concludes that the dominant seventh chord on C-sharp is *not a real dominant seventh chord*. Thus it may look like, sound like, and (crucially) resolve like a dominant seventh chord: it is not a dominant seventh chord. This distrust of the phenomenal may be part of the German idealist heritage; beyond that, one may hear a distant resonance of Parmenidean and Neoplatonic paradigms: *since everything is essentially one (‘monotonal’), plurality is illusory; and: all phenomena are an ‘emanation’ of the One and True (the triad)*.

The same bias relating to ‘keys’ and the associated concept ‘modulation’ is kept alive by Forte and Gilbert, who nevertheless condone the use of these terms “so long as one does not think of them as arbitrary happenings,” adding: “Some of the most orthodox Schenkerians have even been known to utter these words.” Indeed life gets rather difficult without them, witness their frequent use of the word ‘keys’ (scare quotes applied).<sup>16</sup>

In Schubert’s *Waltz op. 18: 10 in B minor (D145)* (Example 1), there is a move to the relative major by the short and easy road of the ‘natural’ VII, or V in D major. Felix Salzer remarks that from D there is no movement “back” to B minor: the D major section is III in a “structural I–III–V–I progression” which constitutes “a motion onward in one single direction”. Therefore, there is no modulation.

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<sup>14</sup> It is true, as Cohn and Dempster state (1992, footnote 4), that systems theory postdates Schenker (in fact the word ‘hierarchy’ is in contemporary lexica almost exclusively associated with the Roman Catholic clergy). On the other hand, a grasp of the concepts of hierarchies of command and of division (as in metre) does not depend on such theory.

<sup>15</sup> Schenker (1906) p. 191, Ex. 157

<sup>16</sup> Forte and Gilbert (1982) p. 277 and *Instructor’s Manual* p. 33; Schachter (1999) p. 144–151

Whereas the theory of modulation is based on the self-contradictory conception of departing from a key while remaining within the key, structural hearing proves that a piece with the key signature of B minor is really in B minor only, because that key accounts for every chord, with or without its prolongation, as an integral part of a musical organism defining one key.<sup>17</sup>

Though Salzer has more to say about hierarchy than Schenker, his commentary betrays the same insistence on *S1.1.3*. “Self-contradictory” is the theory of modulation only if it all happens on one level. Hierarchically, we can find ourselves both ‘in D’ (phrase-wise) and ‘in B’ (piece-wise). Whether one speaks here of ‘modulation’ or a ‘digression’ is moot; the seventh chord of bar 7 however is no doubt heard as V, not as VII (indeed Salzer calls it an applied dominant, in spite of its strong linear connections).

**Example 1:** Schubert, *Walzer op. 18:10 D145*

The main ‘motion’ is considered to be I–III–V–I, these degrees constituting one reduction level. If the seventh chord on A is an applied dominant, this implies a ‘tonicization’ (*Tonikalisierung*) of D major. The V on the other hand merely figures in the concluding cadence. On the way from III to V however we meet another dominant seventh (bar 12), which crucially fails to resolve as such, initiating a chromatic bass ascent toward V. Here IV in D is elided, IV in B minor instead realized (bar 14); according to Salzer a passing chord, but more likely a cadential harmony on equal footing with the ensuing  $I_4^6$ –V. Bars 12–14 therefore move through the combined subdominant regions, creating a cadential phrase of IV–V–I. Since the III is tonicized, it seems unfair to give it equal structural weight with the cadential V, which has merely local importance; rather, the region III/D major is on one level with the cadential phrase IV–V–I as a whole.

The example is successful in showing that we should not speak here of a *contrast* of keys; especially if we do not make the mistake of ignoring the repeats, where B minor and D major triads are directly confronted, thus creating a widened minor-major key space.<sup>18</sup> With the repeats included we hear a swing (b–D–b–D–b–D–b) rather than a

<sup>17</sup> Salzer (1952) p. 21 and Example V.

<sup>18</sup> A full discussion would take into account the structure of the set.



progression. The cadential phrase as a whole falls under *b*; Salzer's *Stufen* progression therefore confuses, in *T*-perspective, two levels.

The rejection of the concepts of modulation and key-plurality in *S* is cause for a redefinition of 'diatony'. Diatony is conceived not as dependent on what are in *T* diatonic tones, but on the tonic degree. On the other hand, basic ('background') progressions are limited to *T*-diatonic degrees. Somewhat metaphorically the idea might be expressed thus:

*S1.2* Diatony is the dodecatonic field of keys (tonality), in the perspective of a chosen key.

More factually: the topography of the total field of tonal relations is determined by the point of access, 'the key' or the main key.<sup>19</sup> With choice of key, the perspective or pattern of relations changes.

The traditional concept of diatony:

*T1.2* Diatony is the heptatonic area of a given key

– should be understood as the full set (to be defined) of harmonic relations. The traditional alternative is not a simplistic principle of scale membership,<sup>20</sup> but a tonal syntax; in practice, unfortunately, often an eclectic hotchpotch of Riemannian functional and Sechterian scale degree conceptions.

~*T* Key is defined by scale membership.

Leaving details aside, we might say that

*T1.3* Tonality is to be explained as a set of materials plus rules (a syntax)

– where the materials include the full set of keys, their diatonic scalar and harmonic degrees, and the rules include (1) ways of creating correct or 'meaningful' harmonic and melodic progressions (in which the tonic is 'centre'); and (2) ways out of one key area into another. *T* offers an approach, but not a full solution; analytically, compositions are to be explained as expressive creations in tonality as a medium, by an application of many principles.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Schachter (1989) p. 298: "A key is a network of relationships that stretches through all of musical 'space' [...]."

<sup>20</sup> As apparently thought by Brown (2005), p. 146; about functionalism in relation to the scale, see Dahlhaus (1968) p. 13 ff.

<sup>21</sup> Cohn and Dempster (1992) p. 176, noticing in the treatment of motive a discrepancy between Schenkerian theory and practice, sensibly recommend that "instead of thinking of a complex musical surface as unified by an underlying structural simplicity, we consider the musical surface as a *solution* to the compositional problem of mutually satisfying the demands of several sets of independent formal operations. In other words, the compositional surface is something like the intersection - perhaps even the unique intersection - of several formally independent compositional parameters." Only the *Ursatz* dictate prevents such a common sense approach.

*S* on the contrary purports to be a single principle approach. In Schenker's view, reduction of the phenomenal 'surface' to its basic constituents is carried beyond the key to the tonic triad, which is considered an organically generative principle rather than a brick in the box. From a rational, naturalistic or common sense viewpoint, no aspect of tonality is inherent in the triad: given the triad, we cannot 'generate' tonality or a key unless we are in the possession of an additional set of principles of derivation. No doubt one can reduce a system to an almost arbitrarily small set of basic, given 'entities', if one provides a correspondingly larger set of transformation rules. Since Schenker thought of the derivation of tonality from the triad as 'organic' (apparently with little interest in the chemistry of organic processes), he never provided a full set of transformation rules. His principles for deriving a composition from the *Ursatz* (and the *Ursatz* from the triad) leave a lot undetermined, to be filled in with unformalized *T*-notions and intuition.

Thus, the basic tenet:

*S1.3* Key is a "temporal projection of the tonic triad"<sup>22</sup>

– reflects a way of thinking which reifies its basic assumptions: it supposes an object (the triad) rather than a more abstract relational ordering of scale degrees (where we should think of tones and chords as concretizing relations rather than as sounds 'projecting' themselves). This reifying or 'thingish' thinking unavoidably invests the object with active properties which cannot be accounted for in rational terms. One could devise an elaborate set of transformation rules to derive tonality from the triad-as-tonic, but this would obliterate all imaginary economy and simplicity of the one-principle-approach.<sup>23</sup>

By analogy to *S1.3*'s derivation of the key from the tonic triad, secondary keys are derivations from the main harmonic scale degrees or *Stufen*:

*S1.4* Secondary keys are a projection of *Stufen* in the main key.<sup>24</sup>

*T* is based on larger ordered set of primary entities. Correspondingly:

*T1.4.1* A key is a diatonic set, comprising scale tones and corresponding harmonic degrees, subjected to rules of harmonic progression, with the tonic triad as centre.

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<sup>22</sup> Forte (1959) p. 8; cf. Schachter (1999) p. 187

<sup>23</sup> This mode of thinking is common in religious contexts, cf. my *God and the calculus of belief*, <<http://www.xs4all.nl/~lmuns/CalculusOfBelief.pdf>> (p. 8).

<sup>24</sup> W. Drabkin: "In his analyses from the mid-1920s on he described the basic harmonic structure of a piece as a progression of *Stufen* entirely within a single tonality (*Tonalität*). At later levels in the analysis these would be expanded into harmonic regions, or keys, in their own right (*Stufen der Tonalität als Tonarten*) [...]" (article *Stufe*, Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 6-6-8), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>).

*T1.4.2* Secondary keys are established in ways analogous to the main key, to the extent that the pitch contents of a given selection matches the diatonic set of that key (rather than that of another) and that they are confirmed by strong harmonic progressions.

*T1.4*, defining ‘key’ diatonically, implies that chords should be classified according to nearest or contextually most probable match. The process of establishing a new key by gradual or abrupt introduction of non-diatonic tones or chords is modulation:

*T1.5* Modulation involves the establishment of a secondary key by re-interpretation of a chord or chords in the context of that key.

The same process (though more restricted) is called ‘tonicization’ in *S*:

*S1.5* Through tonicization, a non-tonic chord (scale degree or otherwise) may be established as tonic on its level.

More restricted: because modulation allows for the introduction of a new key by other degrees than its tonic. The concept of ‘tonicization’ logically implies, by the promotion of some degree to the status of tonic, a secondary *key*, for a chord can be tonic only in relation to other degrees. William Drabkin’s *New Grove* definition of tonicization:

The act of establishing a new key centre, or of giving a degree other than the first the role of tonic. This is accomplished by emphasizing the crucial properties of that tonic, in particular its fourth scale degree and leading note, both of which are part of its dominant 7th chord.<sup>25</sup>

– indeed silently substitutes ‘key’ for ‘tonic’ halfway the second sentence.

The interpretation of secondary keys as ‘projections’ or elaborations of *Stufen* in the main key poses a problem of explanation analogous to that of the reduction of the main key to the tonic triad. To describe tonality as ‘the key in motion’ and the key as the triad ‘in motion’ is offering no more than a metaphor for a process by which a scale degree as *Stufe* is supposed on a higher structural level to ‘generate’ in some sense other degrees.<sup>26</sup>

The insight that chords are not equally significant is not controversial. No competent *T*-ist will number the chords in the first bar of the *Sonate pathétique* as I–I<sub>6</sub>–V<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup>–I–(VII of V)–V and regard this as a linear sequence of events. One would probably see here primarily a move from I to V; secondarily, an emphasis on V by the applied VII (or ‘raised IV’); finally, an elaboration of I by voice exchange with a passing V<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup>. If we see Chopin’s C minor Etude op. 10 nr. 12, bars 10–18 as a variation on this Beethoven bar, it illustrates beautifully how passing notes and neighbour notes may become increasingly significant: where Beethoven has a V<sub>4</sub><sup>6</sup>, Chopin has an unsupported

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<sup>25</sup> Article *Tonicization*, Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 6–6–8), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

<sup>26</sup> cf. Cook (1987) p. 39–40.

passing note (bar 10); corresponding to Beethoven's applied VII, Chopin has first just a neighbour note, which though deriving harmonic identity from its shared pitches with the C minor harmony is still just a neighbour (A<sub>b</sub>, bar 12); in the counterstatement (bar 14), the raised neighbour is part of a diminished  $\text{}_3^4$  which through a series of passing-though-functional chords leads to the  $\text{I}_4^6\text{--V--I}$  cadence.

The *T* viewpoint might therefore be represented as:

*T1.6* The harmonic significance of chords is graded, depending on context.<sup>27</sup>

In *S*, *Stufe* is not just 'scale degree' but a kind of super-degree, which sucks in most of what in *T* is contained in the concept 'key':

[...] die Stufe bildet eine *höhere abstrakte Einheit*, so daß sie zuweilen mehrere Harmonien konsumiert, von denen jede einzelne sich als selbständiger Dreiklang oder Vierklang betrachten ließe; d. h. wenn gegebenenfalls mehrere Harmonien auch selbständigen Drei- oder Vierklängen ähnlich sehen, so können sie unter Umständen nichtsdestoweniger zugleich auch eine Dreiklangssumme, z. B. C E G hervortreiben, um derentwillen sie dann alle unter den Begriff eben des Dreiklanges auf C, als einer Stufe, subsumiert werden müssen.

So bewahrt denn die Stufe ihren höheren Charakter dadurch, daß sie über Einzelerscheinungen hinweg ihre innere Einheitlichkeit durch einen einzigen Dreiklang – gleichsam ideell – verkörpert.<sup>28</sup>

Metaphysics aside, the *Stufe* is equated with any structural (higher level) chord, and with any chord progression which is considered subjected to some structural chord. Thus, '*Stufe*' covers, among other things, the *T*-concept of secondary key.

*S1.6.1 Stufe* is: (a) structural triad (or tone) in the main key; (b) the same, with the secondary chords associated with it; (c) also, outside the main key, the tonal area which is considered harmonically or linearly dependent on some structural triad (or tone).

*S1.6.2* The classification of a chord as *Stufe* is level-dependent: an element of prolongation may be *Stufe* on the next lower level.

Since at the highest level *Stufen* are diatonic, the concept of diatony is extended over all modulatory digressions within the composition. To the outsider this may appear a

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<sup>27</sup> Dahlhaus (1962) p. 601: "Die Differenzierung des "Gewichtes" der Akkorde stammt aus der Tradition der Stufentheorie. Simon Sechter unterscheidet zwischen "eigentlicher Fundamentalfortschreitung" und Akkorden, "welche als Neben-harmonien nicht zur eigentlichen Fundamentalfortschreitung [...] gerechnet werden dürfen". Dahlhaus (1983) p. 84: "Niemand leugnet, daß Zusammenklänge, die wie selbständige Akkorde aussehen, das Resultat von Stimmführungen sein können, die dann als primäres Konstituens des Tonsatzes erscheinen. Das Verhältnis zwischen Stimmführung und Harmonik ist jedoch [...] keine Alternative, die dazu zwingt, ein Phänomen entweder der Stimmführung oder der Harmonik zu-zuschreiben." See also Schwab-Felisch (2005) p. 343.

<sup>28</sup> Schenker (1906) p. 181 (emphasis or. spaced); Schenker (1910) p. xxx: Rameau did not suspect "wie nur erst mehrere Klänge eines Generalbasses zusammen eventuell Anspruch auf die Bedeutung einer Stufe haben [...]."

mere terminological quirk; but in connection with Schenker's voice leading principles the consequences of the chord-for-key exchange are significant.

A basic harmonic outline cannot comprise any other keys than those of diatonic *Stufen*. At the highest level this outline is invariably I–V–I; the second level fills it out with II, III or IV preceding V.

*S1.7.1* The basic *Stufen* progression is I–V–I.

*S1.7.2* This progression is amplified as: I–II–V–I, I–III–V–I, or I–IV–V–I.

Lower levels are defined by linear elaboration. The temptation to create in *T* a similar hierarchy by projecting the cadence as prototypical chord progression on to a higher plane is frustrated by the fact that key sequences do not conform to the model of chord sequences. *S* sweeps irregularities in the high level *Stufen* order under the carpet by relegating any nonconformist key to a subordinate level.<sup>29</sup> Its standard is the basic progression of the top level, not the cadences of the foreground. In this, *S* ignores other structural factors: duration, cadential confirmation, and what one may call confirmation by thematic content (thematic 'recapitulations' are more confirmatory than undifferentiated passagework).

The appending of lower level progressions to a *Stufe* is what is understood under the term 'prolongation' (in which process the *Stufe* may be tonicized or not).

*S1.8* By being subject to prolongation, a melodic or harmonic scale degree is constituted as *Stufe* in the sense of *S1.6*. Prolongation proceeds by operations like unfolding, arpeggiation, linear progressions.

*T1.8* Stronger harmonic progressions may contain weaker detail progressions.

While in *T*-view the key is represented (implicitly or explicitly) through all its degrees, or rather their relations, in *S* the key-*Stufe* is imagined as an amplified degree I, being "in effect without being literally represented at every moment".<sup>30</sup> This may be a roundabout way of saying that any sufficiently defined set of degrees within the key area implies *as a set* a tonic (as the sequence VII-III-VI-II leaves no doubt about key identity). Typical formulations however suggest the presence of degree I as a kind of 'virtual' if not metaphysical entity, or a force which controls the other degrees. It leads to curious formulations in which tones and chords are credited with inner life, with urges and tendencies. (Schenker explicitly propagated such views).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> cf. Dahlhaus (1983) p. 85

<sup>30</sup> Forte and Gilbert (1982) p. 142

<sup>31</sup> e.g. Schenker (1935) p. 57

## 2. Harmony contra counterpoint

In *T*, the harmonic significance of chords is dependent on context and on frame of reference. In *S*, the tendency is to rule out all chords in passing or neighbour motion as harmonic entities: “Since they originate in motion and voice leading, they cannot be the concern of harmony; examination of problems of voice leading and voice motion is the task of the discipline of counterpoint.”<sup>32</sup> This contradicts *S1.6.2*, which makes *Stufe*/non-*Stufe* identity dependent on level. Though it seems to fit uncomfortably within the context of the theory, Schenkerian practice seems to justify a rigorous formulation:

*S2.1* Chords which are not *Stufen* have no harmonic significance and are to be explained exclusively as products of voice leading.

The segregation of both realms is based on the following principle:

*S2.2* Contrapuntal motion is conjunct motion; harmonic motion is by chord roots a fifth apart<sup>33</sup>

– the applicability of which is extended through the assumption of ‘hidden steps’ (or silent dominants, a postulate taken over from Sechter).

According to *S2.2*, what is in *T*-terms one and the same harmonic progression is contrapuntal if the bass proceeds by scale steps, but harmonic if by roots: thus a simple  $\hat{3}/I-\hat{2}/V-\hat{1}/I$  is harmonic in root positions, but contrapuntal if laid out as  $I-V_6-I$ . Commenting that “only the grammatical status of the chords is similar [...] Certainly tonic and dominant chords are used in both cases, but the significance of these chords in the two examples is widely divergent,”<sup>34</sup> Salzer invites the question: What then is *grammar*? – Evidently, in his conception, the harmonic functions of tonic and dominant which apply to the ‘contrapuntal’ setting as well. Then, what is the *significance*? – Since both phrases seem to ‘say’ the same thing:  $\hat{3}/I-\hat{2}/V-\hat{1}/I$ . In spite of *S2.2*, Schenker and Schenkerians do use ‘graded numbering’ (small and large Roman numerals), apparently acknowledging a ‘degree of harmonicity’ quite in line with *T*.

The relations of harmony and counterpoint are notoriously hard to define, mainly because a categorization of weaker (or even stronger) chords as product of either the one or the other should be resisted. *T* allows for a historical view, and historical listening, rather than the supra-historical and unitary perception of *S*: principles of various provenance are cooperating with varying relevance at different times. In the free manner of the post-baroque era, a texture in ‘voices’ is inconsistently applied, restricting the ways in which voice leading determines musical motion.

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<sup>32</sup> Salzer (1952) p. 49

<sup>33</sup> Salzer (1952) p. 48-50

<sup>34</sup> Salzer (1952) p. 89 and Ex. 96

T2.3.1 Harmony and counterpoint are interrelated and inseparable.<sup>35</sup>

T2.3.2 Counterpoint and harmony are different sets of rules, applying to overlapping phenomena.

The Schenkerian view is that counterpoint is basically independent of harmony, and that didactically both should be kept strictly apart.<sup>36</sup> The basic syntax of music is contrapuntal: a correct and indeed beautiful musical progression is possible by the rules of counterpoint alone.

[...] counterpoint is logically prior to harmony and not the other way around; strict counterpoint presents what we might call the tonal language in its simplest syntactic forms. Indeed Schenker compares species exercises to the simple sentences found in foreign language textbooks. The comparison is quite apt, with one important exception: a well constructed counterpoint exercise necessarily has a genuine beauty usually lacking in such sentences, and Schenker often calls attention to the beautiful features of the counterpoints he quotes.<sup>37</sup>

The obvious answer is, that it is perfectly possible to create a harmonic progression which makes tonal ‘sense’ even with faulty voice leading; on the other hand, a correct voice leading exercise may sound tonally meaningless: within the style, our sense of ‘direction’ does not derive from intervallic motion, but from the progression of harmonic scale degrees. Besides, contemporary linguistics testifies to the intricacy of ordinary language; one might find beauty in that.

According to *T*, to *beziffer* or not to *beziffer* is not a matter of principle, but of convenience. Voice leading is not a crucial factor: a chord may be totally coincidental with a voice leading progression, and still be harmonically significant; harmony is a system of relations and direction rather than a set of *Stufen*. Under microscopic attention, a passing chord may well be heard as a *Stufe*, though in broader perspective this significance dwindles.

In *S*, where a chord can be linearly related to a preceding or following *Stufe* it is considered of no harmonic significance. Schenker’s example from the *Matthew Passion*, quoted by William Drabkin in his *Stufe* article in *New Grove*, is not successful in demonstrating the point (Example 2). In Drabkin’s paraphrase:

In Schenker’s terms, the listener is prevented from hearing this triad as a ‘fifth *Stufe*’ (V) by the harmonic rhythm of the preceding passage, where there is consistently one change of *Stufe* per

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35 Dahlhaus (1962) p. 587: “Im ‘konkreten’ Tonsatz bilden Harmonik und ‘linearer Kontrapunkt’ eine Einheit von aufeinander bezogenen Momenten. ‘Einheit’ aber bedeutet in Bachs Polyphonie nicht nur, daß die beiden Momente immer zugleich vorkommen oder daß, wenn man sich das eine vorstelle, man das andere mitdenken müsse. Vielmehr gehen sie, obwohl sie bei Kurth als Extreme erscheinen, ständig ineinander über.”

36 Salzer (1952) p. 50 (“[...] our present-day theory very often does not sufficiently separate counterpoint from harmony [...]”; similarly (and emphatically) Schenker (1910) pp. xxx, 15. It is therefore surprising to see Matthew Brown stating that “[...] whereas music theorists had traditionally treated counterpoint and harmony as largely separate phenomena, Schenkerian theory insists that they are irrevocably intertwined. This synthesis is undoubtedly a major step forward in our understanding of tonal relationships.” Brown (2005) p. 66

37 Schachter (1988) p. 525; cf. Schenker (1935) p. 46, 69 and Salzer (1952) p. 51

bar (I–IV–VII–III–VI). It would be superfluous, moreover, to accept a fifth *Stufe* at this point since one arrives in the very next bar; all three notes in the triad can in any case be explained in linear terms.<sup>38</sup>

**Example 2:** Bach, *Matthäuspassion* BWV244, *Aria Buß' und Reu'* (a: after Schenker 1906, b, c: hypothetical)

The image displays three musical models, labeled a, b, and c, for a passage from Bach's *Matthäuspassion* BWV244, *Aria Buß' und Reu'*. Each model consists of a treble and bass staff with notes and rests. Below the staves, Roman numerals indicate the chords. Model 'a' shows a sequence: V - I - IV - VII - III - VI \* (IV) V - I. Model 'b' shows a more regular progression. Model 'c' shows a progression with a disrupted harmonic rhythm, indicated by the asterisk in the Roman numeral VI \* (IV).

Indeed it seems a mistake to identify this chord as V, stacked between VI and IV. The underlying more regular progression thus seems to be *b*. But the difference between *a* and *b* is of harmonic nature rather than just a matter of passing and neighbour notes, and implies an intermediate stage of transformation or alternative model (*c*). At chord (\*) the regularity is disrupted by what appears a passing motion in the bass, accented by the double *Querstand* with its harsh parallel motion. This sixth  $g^{\sharp 1}$ - $e^2$  does not create a ‘false I’ with the bass, but is a double appoggiatura for a  $4^6$  chord, which fails to be realized on the next beat because the bass leaves  $c^{\sharp}$ . Thus the *apparent* V (\*) is, paradoxically, as ‘ $I_4^6$ ’ on Schenkerian terms *really* V,<sup>39</sup> and the ‘IV’ a product of neighbour notes. This model (*c*) explains the displacement of the semiquavers. By the syncopated entry of V on \* the harmonic rhythm is indeed disrupted.

Such hypothetical models are not to be construed as levels in *S*, which sometimes heavily relies on ‘implied’ notes, but uses them as completed progressions which are supposed to be structurally in effect (see the comments on Example 5 below). Models in the sense implied here are more regular and simpler structures, which may (on the basis of historical conventions) be reconstructed as background to the actual ‘surface’, which by *negating* the models *replaces* their ‘background’ structure.

The non-harmonic character of some patterns (like a chain of sixth chords) is non-controversial, at least in the sense that the individual chords do not ‘go’ anywhere in

<sup>38</sup> W. Drabkin: *Stufe*, Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (accessed 6-6-8), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>; also in Drabkin (2002) p. 817; Schenker (1906) p. 187-188. Schenker calls the chord at \* “bloß eine vorübergehende Konfiguration dreier Stimmen” and “kontrapunktischer Zufall”.

<sup>39</sup> To what extent the cadential  $I_4/6$  is syntactically V, ‘sonorically’ I is open to debate.



virtue of their harmonic identity, though we might say that *as scale degrees* they help in defining the key. Where the linear element is most pronounced, it is not counterpoint that leads the way, but instrumental play. Scales in contrary motion do not conform to rules of voice leading. Their key defining quality is their only ‘harmonic’ sense, their linear outline their only ‘contrapuntal’.

*T2.4* Certain stock patterns originating in instrumental playing techniques may overrule rules of harmonic and voice leading progression.

Among sequential patterns *Quintschrittsequenze* occasion some controversy. While in *Stufentheorie* à la Sechter they are the very model of harmonic progression, in Riemannian functional theory they are harmonically static since the ‘secondary’ degrees proceed in an autonomous way, instead of conforming to their role as substitutes for tonic, subdominant or dominant. In this sense the Riemannian position agrees with *S*, since both consider the sequence as dependent on a larger, embracing progression.<sup>40</sup>

*S2.4* Sequential patterns are to be regarded as voice leading creations exclusively.

There is no reason to adopt Riemannian functionalism and define II, III, VI and VII as *Vertreter*. That in linear syntax they sometimes take the same places, does not imply that they ‘mean’ the same (a deceptive cadence is very much *unlike* an authentic cadence). One of the few things Riemann shares with Schenker is a high premium on tonic dependency. Granting that harmonic degrees have key-forming relations *inter se* allows for a more liberal and nuanced view of the ‘harmonic’.<sup>41</sup>

*T2.5* Sequential patterns can be analyzed from contrapuntal and harmonic viewpoints.

Summarizing the relations of harmony and counterpoint in a formula, it seems fair to say:

*T2.6a* Harmony tells us where to go, voice leading how to get there.

Non-metaphorically:

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40 Forte and Gilbert (1982) p. 25: “The linear intervallic pattern, which occurs in all tonal music regardless of period, style, or genre, may be viewed as the quintessential progression that is not determined by harmonic relations.” cf. Brown (2005) p. 121 on Schenker’s rejection of the concept, which may simply express a dislike of sequences, or an intuition of their undermining the segregation of counterpoint and harmony. A polemic of *T* against *S* was fought by Dahlhaus and Federhofer, Dahlhaus (1962) p. 602–3 and (1983), Federhofer (1984).

41 Dahlhaus (1971) p. 225

*T2.6b* Tonal motion is harmonic progression; its note-to-note details are regulated by rules of voice leading.<sup>42</sup>

*S* distinguishes two kinds of motion, contrapuntal and harmonic (*S2.2*). Predominantly however motion is linear. The *Stufen* have no directional value in themselves but are like “spotlights” that illuminate patches of the contrapuntal fabric<sup>43</sup>; with a somewhat exaggerated metaphor, one might say that *S* treats harmony like the patches of water colour on an engraving, while *T* speaks of a painting in oils.

*S2.6* Musical motion is directed by counterpoint, supported by *Stufen* at higher levels.<sup>44</sup>

Though similar suppositions belong to the core of both the Schenkerian programme and analytic practice, reality is more complex. When Schenker comments on a Fuxian counterpoint example:

Hier sieht man drei Stimmen in natürlichen Gang gebracht, sie gehen aus verschiedenen Gründen, deren Erörterung eben in die Lehre vom Kontrapunkt gehört, alle den plausibelsten Weg und vereinigen sich zu Klängen, ohne damit aber irgendwelchen Stufengang, irgendwelchen bestimmten Sinn aussprechen zu wollen.<sup>45</sup>

– it is clear that without *harmonic direction* the music has no ‘meaning’ (*Sinn*). Forte and Gilbert make the same point, when they present a Fuxian first-species counterpoint “quite neutral with respect to harmonic progression”.<sup>46</sup> That is what makes their textbook example *not tonal*, in the sense in which the music of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries is tonal.

According to *T*, grammatical coherence in both small and large dimensions derives above all from the hierarchic and partly recursive character of tonal harmony (*T1.1*). Schenker, who detested modal music<sup>47</sup>, tried to transplant the vision of linear coherence associated with modal polyphony onto harmonic tonality by reinterpreting the grammatical virtues of harmony as contrapuntal; a consequence of his desire to see the Bach-to-Brahms era as the natural and definitive self-realisation of music (a vision created in the 1780’s by J. N. Forkel, who significantly saw harmony as the

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42 Dahlhaus (1975) p. 222: “Das Verhältnis zwischen Harmonik und Kontrapunkt, *zwischen den Kategorien, die dem Systemzusammenhang der Töne zugrundeliegen, und den Normen, die den Tonsatz regulieren*, ist zu verwickelt, als daß es sich in eine Formel fassen ließe.” My emphasis – to bring out the positive statement which is in fact contained in the negative.

43 Schenker (1906) p. 199

44 Schenker (1996) p. 1: “The conceptual unity of a linear progression signifies a conceptual tension between the beginning and the end of the progression: the primary note is to be retained until the point at which the concluding note appears. This tension alone engenders musical coherence. In other words, *the linear progression is the sole vehicle of coherence, of synthesis.*”

45 Schenker (1906) p. 199

46 Forte and Gilbert (1982) p. 44. Schwab-Felisch (2005) p. 344: “Tatsächlich hat Schenker das Wechselverhältnis der Dimensionen deutlich hervorgehoben [...]”.

47 See e.g. the diatribe in Schenker (1910) p. 30-34.

source of musical coherence or ‘logic’).<sup>48</sup> In this area Schenker made his decisive move, the attempt to construct a vision of classical music in the spirit of counterpoint. Therefore, from this point it will no longer be possible or practical to translate *S* into parallel (though not equivalent) notions of *T*. *S* stipulates that voice leading regulates progression not only on the note-to-note distance but on the middle and longest distances as well. To explain the coherence of the long range lines, these distances or time spans and the events creating them are interpreted as hierarchically lower and dependent levels.

S2.7 Voice leading principles are in effect over an unlimited range; that is, over the whole of a composition, and its analytically lower levels.

Though probably no *T*-ist will deny that a highly exposed dissonant may have its resolution beyond a series of intervening chords (analogous to linguistic phenomena), within *T*:

T2.7 Voice leading principles apply at short range; typically, from one chord (tone) to the next.

Consequently, in *S* a composition is (logically rather than intentionally) a top-down process of elaboration. Inversely, a composition may be analytically reduced through progressive stages (levels) up to level zero or the *Ursatz*.

Since much happens in between structural (high level) tones, *S* is in need of a way to explain how structural tones remain ‘in force’ even though not sounding. It attempts to do this by the notion of ‘motion to an inner voice’.

S2.8 “Linear progressions [*Züge*] in the treble that descend signify motion to an inner voice of the original [higher level] chord or the ensuing one. Those that rise signify motion from an inner voice to the treble.”<sup>49</sup>

Thus the phenomenon of melody is cut up and divided between harmony and counterpoint (voice leading). This may be seen as a magnification and idealisation of two elements, the conventional keyboard texture beautifully exemplified in the F Major Prelude in the second volume of *Das wohltemperierte Klavier*, which makes lines flow into chords and chords flow out in lines; and of ‘compound melody’, discussed extensively as a preliminary to Schenkerian analysis by Forte and Gilbert. The first texture keeps pitches sounding while at the same time leading away from them; the second implies a ‘permanence’ (in short-term memory or rather in *Gestalt* anticipation) of a pitch no longer sounding (and sometimes implies a pitch never sounding at all); rather like a linguistic phrase element remains ‘active’ during an

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<sup>48</sup> See Forkel (1788) § 74 and my as yet unpublished *C.P.E. Bach, Haydn and the art of mixed feelings*,  
< <http://www.xs4all.nl/~lmuns/Empfndsmkt.htm> >

<sup>49</sup> Schenker (1996) p. 2

unfinished sentence.<sup>50</sup> (I wonder whether the extensive ‘embedding’ in the German language – notably, insertion of phrases within the verb phrase – has contributed to the rise of German classical music). In compound melody, we can re-order consecutive pitches as simultaneous in a regular chord progression. Schenker’s linear *Züge* go beyond this in an unprecedented way.

Schenkerian *Züge* do retain a link with harmonic progression, by the stipulation that

*S2.9* The total distance traversed in a *Zug* spans an interval present in the structural chord on which it they depends.<sup>51</sup>

However, in connecting two chords a *Zug* shares the harmonic content (endnotes) with only one chord (which is therefore considered the responsible *Stufe*); to explain the other as product of ‘horizontalization’ makes little sense. Nevertheless, according to *S*, all harmonic and melodic motion is as it were suspended on such *Züge*, with the *Urlinie* as the ultimate peg from which hang all others. Thus, in Example 3a (the middle period of three), the tonic of bar 4 is prolonged *backwards* through three bars (*Zug* f<sup>1</sup>-d<sup>2</sup>): three bars of dominant ‘prolonging’ a tonic-to-come. The same thing happens next with the dominant (*Zug* e<sup>b2</sup> -a<sup>1</sup>).<sup>52</sup> The melodic outline of bars 11-14 can be accounted for trivially by the fact that I and V have notes in common; the same goes for the subdominant-dominant progression of the following bars. The concept of *Zug* seems to imply that the melody notes f<sup>1</sup> and a<sup>1</sup> are ‘participating in’ the B<sub>b</sub>-chord (indeed they *do* in the key of B<sub>b</sub>). In Schenker’s analysis of the entire Chorale (Example 3b), the whole period is seen to be a prolongation of *Kopftón*  $\hat{3}$  (d<sup>2</sup>) in bar 1 (which remains, with a neighbour note, in effect until the penultimate bar!), though his Roman numerals plausibly indicate an overarching middleground V.<sup>53</sup>

**Example 3a:** Haydn (?), *Chorale St. Antoni HobII:47* (after Forte and Gilbert 1982, Ex. 148)



50 Schenker (1996) p. 1: “The conceptual unity of a linear progression signifies a conceptual tension between the beginning and the end of the progression: the primary note [*Kopftón*] is to be retained until the point at which the concluding note appears. This tension alone engenders musical coherence. In other words, *the linear progression is the sole vehicle of coherence, of synthesis.*” (Original emphasis). Schenker (1910) p. 20: “Wer kann denn übersehen, daß er [Goethe], trotz allerhand Umstellungen, im Grunde doch nur Prolongationen auch noch der normalsten grammatischen Gesetze aufweist? Ähnlich formen ja auch die neuen Gewalten, die der freie Satz in der Musik mit sich bringt, eine scheinbar neue Ordnung, und dennoch sieht der Kenner im Hintergrunde tief und mystisch die grundlegenden kontrapunktischen Gesetze wirken, so daß die Erscheinungen im freien Satz durchaus nur als deren Prolongationen wieder zu erkennen sind.” Schenker’s comment on the exclamatory opening sentence of Faust’s first monologue seems exaggerated (the sentence however contains two characteristic interjections: *Ach!* and *Leider!* which are the opposite of prolongations).

51 Schenker (1994) p. 107; Forte and Gilbert (1982) p. 237; Snarrenberg (1997) p. 20 disagrees with this definition.

52 Forte and Gilbert (1982) p. 160 and Example 148

53 Schenker (1935) Ex. 42.2; cf. Schwab-Felisch (2005) p. 350

**Example 3b:** Haydn (?), *Chorale St. Antoni* HobII:47 (reduction from Schenker 1935, Ex. 42/2)

Haydn, Chorale St. Antoni

The image shows a musical score for Haydn's Chorale St. Antoni, HobII:47. The score is in G major, 2/4 time. The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The analysis includes Roman numerals for the harmonic structure and labels for voice leading and Ursatz. The analysis is a reduction from Schenker 1935, Ex. 42/2.

In its application of the voice leading principle to any level above the foreground Schenker and Schenkerians take considerable liberties. These liberties are not accidental, but expose an incongruence at the heart of the idea and should raise doubt about the applicability of the principle of recursion to voice leading.<sup>54</sup>

### 3. Hunting for the *Urlinie*

According to Schenker, the *Ursatz* is an elaboration of the triad; the triad is a representation of the first five partials in the overtone series. Hence all triadic tonal music ‘grows organically’ from a natural origin.<sup>55</sup> Nowadays this line of thinking is even among most Schenkerians in disrepute; the reasons are logical, scientific and political. It involves an arbitrary truncation of the overtone series as legitimizing principle; not without a large number of additional assumptions can one ‘derive’ the *Ursatz* from the triad; and it makes historically and culturally bound style standards absolute.

*S3.1.1* the *Urlinie* has the form  $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ ,  $\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$  or  $\hat{8}-\hat{7}-\hat{6}-\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ .

*S3.1.2* Together with a bass outlining I–V–I, the *Urlinie* constitutes the *Ursatz*.  
In all cases,  $\hat{2}$  coincides with the V.

The extended forms  $\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$  and  $\hat{8}-\hat{7}-\hat{6}-\hat{5}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ , where the balance between treble and bass is disturbed, might be seen as concessions to reality (the added steps could also be a *Zug* attached to the 3). A significant consequence is that not merely is a melodic-harmonic unity prolonged ( $\hat{3}/I$  and  $\hat{2}/V$ ), but the passing dissonances as well.

<sup>54</sup> Brown (2005) pp. 83–84: “Besides proposing that any complex tonal surface can be explained as a composing out of some simple progression, ‘The Recursive Model’ also presumes that whenever a given progression is expanded by the recursive application of a given transformation, the resulting progression conforms to the same laws of voice leading and harmony as the starting progression. To quote from *Der freie Satz*, “The principles of *voice leading*, organically anchored, remain the same in background, middleground, and foreground, even when they undergo transformations.” [...] It is important to mention, however, that Schenker wasn’t always able to achieve this goal; [...] he was sometimes inconsistent in his treatment of the laws prohibiting parallel perfect octaves and fifths.” See also Benjamin (1981) p. 163 on “contradictory lines of reasoning” and note 60 below.

<sup>55</sup> Salzer (1952) p. 149; Schachter (1999) p. 191; critically, Clark (1990); Cook (1987) p. 39, n. 2: “[...] this metaphysics is highly questionable [...]. [...] But I don’t think one can understand why Schenker did what he did without taking this metaphysics into consideration; in particular, it explains otherwise arbitrary prejudices and restrictions in his analytical techniques.”

Whatever the *Ursatz* may actually *be*, ontologically, epistemologically, and aesthetically: the simplest interpretation seems to take it as a diagrammatic expression of two precepts: (1) to reduce the score to hierarchically nested levels of (harmonic) I–V–I (or ‘interrupted’, and occasionally partial: I–V and V–I); (2) to locate the structural *Stufen* in accordance with the treble progression  $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$  (or its extensions). As for the second, it must be admitted that many melodies can be seen as constructed on a descending scalar outline, in which voice leading is a shaping force; and no doubt the extent to which this can be plausibly done has only been revealed by the massive output of Schenkerian reductions. Voice leading thus is certainly a factor in melodic creation. Such surface analysis is however not the focus of Schenkerian interest: the principle is applied not as a tool of melodic, but of formal analysis.

Considering such long range connections plausible and meaningful, Schenkerians still wrestle (or play) with a lack of criteria for locating the *Urlinie*-tones, especially the first note or *Kopftön*. The only criterium Schenker offers is the plausibility of its linear continuations and derivations in middleground and foreground, which makes the procedure circular and rules out unprejudiced perception.<sup>56</sup> Nothing better seems to have been proposed than Forte and Gilbert’s recommendation to look for the “highest active degree of the tonic triad”, with “melodic emphasis” as a concomitant; a proposal rejected as “falsified by many of Schenker’s own analyses” by Charles Smith.<sup>57</sup>

An even more alarming difficulty derives from the philosophical contradiction between letting surface emphases determine what is purportedly the most fundamental property of the background – especially given Schenker’s conviction that musical surfaces are deceptive and misleading, and must be interpreted by means of prior knowledge of what is going on in the background. It appears as if the only things in the foreground that can lead us to the background cannot be trusted to do so – at least not until we have already been led there. This paradox is particularly frustrating when we try to teach students how to select a primary note – and cast about to find some grounds upon which to criticise what we (perhaps rightly) regard as their incorrect choices.<sup>58</sup>

Elements of arbitrariness are added by (1) allowances for vertical (*Koppelung*) and lateral displacement of one or more tones (see Example 3b); (2) the association of

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<sup>56</sup> Schenker (1935) p. 44: “Die Wahl des Eröffnungsintervalles erfolgt nach den Grundsätzen der kontrapunktischen Setzweise. Bei der Wahl entscheidet die Fortsetzung und der Bedarf des Stückes nach Fühlungnahme mit dem Mittel- und Vordergrund, wie doch auch im Rahmen einer c.f.-Aufgabe die bestmögliche Fortsetzung bestimmend ist.” Smith (1996) p. 274: “In deciding whether a particular passage is to be analysed with a 3-, a 5- or an 8-line, these comments are no help at all. In his analyses, the choice of primary notes never seems to have been a problem; they look as if their creator simply knew which structure he was hunting, but never give us any hints as to how he knew.” Forte (1959) p. 22: “Curiously enough, Schenker did not explain in his writings how to carry out a reduction.”

<sup>57</sup> Forte and Gilbert (1982) p. 178

<sup>58</sup> Smith (1996) p. 275

structural tones with prolongational bass, vice versa<sup>59</sup>; (3) as mentioned above, licences with voice leading in middle and background levels.<sup>60</sup>

The postulate that the *Urlinie* should begin on  $\hat{3}$ ,  $\hat{5}$  or  $\hat{8}$  may have aesthetic reasons: classical paradigmatic polarities like tension-resolution, imbalance-balance, striving-realization. For Schenker it was more than an abstract matrix; it had to *mean* something: directed movement, tension and fulfilment.

Als melodisches Nacheinander in bestimmten Sekundschriften bedeutet die Urlinie Bewegung, Spannung zu einem Ziele hin, und zuletzt auch die Erfüllung dieses Weges. Unser eigener Lebenstrieb ist es, den wir solcherart auch in die Bewegung des Urlinie-Zuges hineintragen, sie offenbart einen völligen Gleichklang mit unserem Seelenleben. Die Brechung der Unterstimme bedeutet ebenfalls Bewegung zu einem bestimmten Ziele hin und Erfüllung des Weges, den Weg zur Oberquint und zurück zum Grundton.<sup>61</sup>

I think Schenker has succumbed here (and in many other places) to the temptation of confusing the analytically (hierarchically) deep with the conceptually profound. Schenkerian reduction is essentially – and this in itself is not a criticism – a reduction to increasing banality; like saying (in *T*) that “this piece is in E-flat” is a banal, though significant remark. It is agreed by many ‘liberal’ Schenkerians (though certainly not in line with Schenker’s thought) that Schenkerism with its focus on generality is a theory of tonality rather than of the musical artwork.

Accepting the  $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$  directive, we will have to force ourselves to interpret (to ‘hear’) any apparent structural line beginning on  $\hat{1}$  as a preparation (*Anstieg*) for what comes, no matter what our musical intuitions might be. Examples abound where such an interpretation of an initial  $\hat{1}$  is forced and implausible.<sup>62</sup> It is one of the most arbitrarily dogmatic aspects of Schenkerism, that what could be regarded within the paradigm an ‘organic prolongation’ of a *Kopftön*  $\hat{1}$  is not allowed.

All higher level prolongations are supposed to take place before the coincidence of  $\hat{2}$  and V, since the resolution is supposed to be depleted of “kontrapunktische Kraft”.<sup>63</sup> This means that in a  $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$  Ursatz all main events are derived from the  $\hat{3}$ .

### S3.2 All higher level prolongations depart from the degrees preceding $\hat{2}$ .

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<sup>59</sup> Salzer (1952) p. 164

<sup>60</sup> An arbitrary handling of such arbitrariness shows Forte and Gilbert’s Ex. 180 (Sarabande from the first *French Suite*): the *Urlinie* jumps up and down and the *Stufen* sequence is irregular: 5/I – 5/V – 4/IV (involving parallel octave) – 4/V – 3/I – 2/V – 1/I. Some evident middle-range voice leading connections are thereby ignored. Brown (2005) admits that “Schenker was ultimately inconsistent in the way he treated parallel perfect octaves and fifths” (p. 136) and re-interprets sequences in a way so as to avoid them.

<sup>61</sup> Schenker (1935) p. 28

<sup>62</sup> See for instance the chorale examples in Salzer (1952) Ex. III, Forte and Gilbert (1982) Ex. 161 (p. 178). Dahlhaus has rightly criticized the didactic use of Bach’s chorale settings, which in their tonal-modal mixture are ambiguous (“stilistisch zwiespältig und sogar brüchig”), Dahlhaus (1969) p. 206

<sup>63</sup> Schenker (1935) p. 70

Quoting Haydn's *Sonata in E-flat major Hob. XVI:52:iii* (bars 1-28, Example 4), Salzer states that "the reader will readily grasp the phenomenon of harmonic prolongation in the form of a prolonging I–II–V–I" and rightly draws attention to "the magnificent rhetorical use of rests and fermatas."<sup>64</sup> The second observation contradicts the first. The harmonic outline contains twice I–II–V (I–II–V–I<sub>6</sub>–II<sub>6</sub>–V–I). Which I, II and V are 'structural'? Salzer represents the hierarchy *Ursatz*-conform as:

$$\begin{array}{c} -\text{II}-\text{V}-\text{I}_6- \\ \text{I}-\text{---}--\text{II}_6-\text{V}-\text{I} \end{array}$$

– prolonging the *Kopf*- $\hat{3}$  (with octave transposition) all the way to bar 23. Do we indeed experience the II<sub>6</sub> of bar 24, set in running sixteenths, as the decisive event after an extended ('prolonged') I? – Or rather the exclamatory *forte* V of bar 17? I see no reason why we should listen *against* the rhetoric (apart from dogmatic *Kopft*on prolongation). Haydn could hardly make his point in a more straightforward way:

$$\begin{array}{c} -\text{I}_6-\text{II}_6-\text{V}- \\ \text{I} (...!) \text{II} (...!) \text{V} - - - - - \text{I} (!!!) \end{array}$$

**Example 4:** Haydn, *Sonata HXVI:52:iii*

**Presto**

"The Urlinie and bass arpeggiation ruled over him with an instinctive power, and from them he developed an ingenious capacity for creating tension across the whole of a work, as an entity," Schenker says about Haydn in his discussion of the *Sonata in G minor Hob XVI:44/I* (Example 5a, b).<sup>65</sup> Schenker chooses  $\hat{5}$  (d<sup>2</sup>) as *Kopft*on. This pitch is indeed emphasized on the surface by melodic means. Schenker though gives

<sup>64</sup> Salzer (1952) p. 150 and Example 272.

<sup>65</sup> Schenker (1996) p. 24



the sixth *Zug* of bar 2 as an argument, but this misses the  $a^1$  (this ‘ $\hat{2}$ -avoidance’ returns in the final bars of the movement.) It is not clear why the incomplete sixth-*Zug* should have preference over the octave-*Zug* from  $g^2$  to  $g^1$  completed in bars 3-4.

**Example 5a:** Haydn, Sonata HXVI:44:i

**Moderato**

The *Kopfton* is connected through ‘register transfer’ to the  $d^3$ s of bars 8 and 17 (Example 5b). This is dubious for several reasons:

- (1) The connection gets lost through bars 5-7, where an ascent  $d^1-g^1-c^2-f^2-b^2$  is established (the retransition of bars 48-50 has a stretto on this progression).
- (2) In bars 8-10,  $d^3$  and  $d^3$  should for melodic, harmonic and rhythmic reasons be considered accessory to  $b^2$ . The Schenkerian response may be, that notes ornamental in the foreground may be structural on higher levels. The consequence of this line of argument is total arbitrariness: a line may be constructed entirely

from ornamental and ‘implied’ notes (see point 4 below), or just be proclaimed by fiat. Indeed, one could with greater plausibility construct an  $\hat{3}$ -*Urlinie* from the  $b_1^1$  in bar 2 with its conspicuously absent lower second (which adds significance to the cross-over  $b_1^2$ - $a^2$  of bar 3), through ‘register transfer’ to the emphatic  $b_1^3$ s of bars 8 and following.

(3) In Schenker’s middleground graph bars 6-10 (V in  $B_b$ ) have disappeared, creating incorrectly a direct connection of I in G minor to the augmented  $5^6$  of bar 11 (which Schenker has reset to root position ( $\hat{4}IV7^7$ ) in order to eliminate a parallel fifth from his reduction), though this is more properly considered a neighbour note chord.<sup>66</sup> The somewhat abrupt introduction of  $V^7$  in  $B_b$  is in fact a characteristic moment in the exposition; its abruptness motivates its extension.

(4) The middleground  $d^3$  is supposed to be connected (through  $d_1^3$ ) to a neighbour note  $c^3$  in bar 12; *but there is no c in bar 12*, except as an ‘implied’ resolution to the  $d_1^3$  of bar 11, which may be considered merely ornamental (an echo) to a line which has already descended emphatically from  $d_1^3$  to  $e^2$  in bars 10-11. (The concept of ‘neighbour note’ is very widely stretched here).

**Example 5b:** Haydn, Sonata HXVI:44:i (reduction, from Schenker 1926)

In order to construct a non-existent parallelism, Schenker has in his middleground graph rewritten the cadence of bars 19-20 as II-V-I instead of IV-V-I. While the score offers many opportunities for demonstrating cohesion and continuity (not to speak of ‘organic unity’), this analysis paradoxically makes the whole fall apart by creating a fictitious structure which leaves out essential elements, and gives undue importance to ornamental details.

<sup>66</sup> In these bars (6-12) “the desire simultaneously to bring out motives in the bass and the uppers voice led Schenker to an otherwise peculiar decision to ignore the resolution of a dominant-functioning 6/4 chord.” “Schenker’s own discomfort with this solution is reflected in the middleground graph [...], where the 6/4 disappears entirely in favor of events which the foreground graph claims to be subordinate to it.”. Cohn and Dempster (1992) p. 195 and n. 12, p. 179

## 4. Levels and form

Schenkerism's main attraction is probably its hierarchical approach. The hierarchical organization of tonal music as such has received insufficient attention within *T*. Surprisingly, Schenker treated the concept and its realization only in vague ways. He refrained from any clear definition of level, while maintaining (arbitrarily, one must conclude) that for each composition the number was fixed, a consequence of his conviction that reduction retraced composition in inverse direction<sup>67</sup>.

*S4.1.1* Between the *Ursatz* and the actual surface an indeterminate but in each case defined (?) number of closed (?) levels exists.

The strict hierarchy that exists in rhythm seems to have been projected onto pitch: pitch-permanence is treated like metric permanence (like a division in two does not cease because of one or more subdivisions, an *Urlinie* note is supposed to endure over any number of diminutions.) The asymmetries are obvious.

In *T*, form is supposed to be a product of period (phrase) structure in conjunction with harmonic outline, where periods in turn are also primarily harmonically defined, secondarily on the basis of motive-melodic structure. Phrases and periods create a somewhat ambiguous hierarchy, with overlaps which are hard to define objectively. The recursive hierarchic structure of metre and rhythm is connected to the other parameters at various levels (motivic rhythm, phrase rhythm, harmonic rhythm).

*T4.1* Form is a product of period (phrase) structure in conjunction with harmonic outline.

In *S*, form results from elaborations of the *Ursatz*.<sup>68</sup>

*S4.1.2* Prolongations (structural levels) determine form.

Trivially, the final V–I concludes not only the last phrase, but the piece.

*S4.2 = T4.2* If a composition starts in *X*, it must conclude in *X*, or: given I-in-*X* to begin with, the piece will end with V-I-in-*X*.

From this Forte and Gilbert conclude:

Since a tonal piece or movement normally begins and ends on I (the beginning, of course, can be more complicated), and since the end is signaled by an authentic cadence in the tonic key, we can see that the bass at the background level will be framed by the outline I... V–I.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Schenker (1935) p. 58; cf. the hesitant critique in Schachter (1999) p. 188.

<sup>68</sup> Schenker (1935) p. 34 (“[...] nur aus dem Wissen um Hinter-, Mittel- und Vordergrund ergibt sich die Möglichkeit, über “Motiv”, “Thema”, “Phrase”, “Taktstrich” usw. hinaus die wahre musikalische Interpunktion zu gewinnen [...]”); p. 47 (“[...] Wenn die Urlinie mit dem Begriff des Tonraumes sich deckt, so ist schon damit die Heimat aller Formen gegeben [...]”; p. 202 (“[...] Verschiedene Prolongationen sind es, die zu verschiedenen Formen in Mehrteiligkeit führen.”))

This is not equivalent to *S4.2/T4.2*, but a deduction from the *Ursatz* (or rather, the reductive principles it represents, see *S3.2*). If the final V-I is a structural (hierarchically fundamental) cadence, a simplified model:

I-V-I-V-I-V-I

– will in *S* be interpreted as:

–V-I-V-I–  
I – – – – –V-I

or:

*S4.3* Anything before the final cadential V is structurally (prolongationally) I

– which implies that

*S4.4* There are no ‘flat’, non-hierarchic forms or levels.

This creates notorious problems with the interpretation of such forms as variation sets and strophic songs, an area apparently considered aesthetically peripheral by Schenker.<sup>70</sup> A strophic form which might be represented as e.g.:

I-V-I-II-V-I // I-V-I-II-V-I // I-V-I-II-V-I

that is, three equilibrated periods, is *not* (according to *T*):

–V-I-II-V-I // I-V-I-II-V-I // I-V-I-II–  
I – – – – – V – I

The fact that on the basis of its beginning in *X* the piece must end with V-I-in-*X* does not imply a hierarchy which subsumes everything in a I...–V–I frame. The hierarchically defining unit is here the phrase, and the final V–I does not conclude a protracted initial I, but its own phrase; it is the phrase that concludes the piece.<sup>71</sup> If the piece as a whole is ‘prolongationally’ I-in-*X* (simply meaning that it is in *X*), this *includes* the final cadence. In other words, in *T* the bottom of the hierarchy is the key, not the chord. Since in *S* the concept of key is replaced with the prolonged triad, the initial I (with its treble  $\hat{3}$ ) remains ‘in effect’ until it proceeds to the cadential  $\hat{2}/V-\hat{1}/I$ . The *Urlinie* makes the trivial idea of an initial I connected to a final V–I maybe less trivial, but even less plausible. The orthodox Schenkerian position is that perception of long range voice leading is less a matter of fact than an aesthetic imperative, obeyed by a faithful elite. The fact is that one can simply not care to listen that way, and engage intelligently and responsively in many ways with classical music. A

69 Forte and Gilbert (1982) p. 132

70 cf. Drabkin (2002), Marston (1989) (constructing a 5-4-3-2-1 *Urlinie* over a variation set), Smith (1996), Kerman (1980) criticizing Schenker’s reduction of *Aus meinen Thränen sprießen* from Schumann’s *Dichterliebe*.

71 cf. Narmour (1977) p. 18

weightier argument against *S* is that Schenkerian analysis, regardless of matters of perception, presents a distorted musical grammar.

The consequence of the chord-for-key substitution is that entities which determine different hierarchical levels in *T* are brought in direct correspondence in *S*. While in *T* it is the case that

*T*4.5 Chords relate to chords, phrases to phrases, periods to periods,  
movements to movements

in *S*:

*S*4.5 *Stufen* relate to phrases, periods, and whole movements indiscriminately

– thus jumping over hierarchically relevant distinctions, or creating a hierarchy which stands at best in arbitrary correlation with the others. What is seen in Example 4 on a small scale repeats itself on larger scales. Where a form is clearly articulated by a confluence of multiple factors, the overruling *Urlinie*-dictate may produce a wholly different ‘virtual’ form.<sup>72</sup> Though Schenker could ignore ‘flat’ forms as aesthetically peripheral, he could not ignore the main division of sonata form; he therefore accommodated for its obvious deviation by the principle of ‘interruption’ ( $\hat{3}/I-\hat{2}/V // \hat{3}/I-\hat{2}/V-\hat{1}/I$ ). Like the extended *Urlinien*, this looks like a modification which weakens the logic of the theory instead of confirming it. Do we perceive binary form because of the interrupted *Urlinie*, or do we construct an interruption because of the form? If the *Ursatz* is the generative principle it is supposed to be, what causes its interruption? – It would seem, some extraneous sense of form.<sup>73</sup>

Chopin’s *C minor Etude op. 10: 12* is analyzed by Schenker through a  $\hat{3}-\hat{2} // \hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$  interrupted *Urlinie* in the first level (i.e., the level below the *Ursatz*), a  $\hat{3}-\hat{2} / \hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1} // \hat{3}-\hat{2} / \hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$  in the second level.<sup>74</sup>

(1) At this second level, Schenker maintains *Kopftön*  $e_3$  from bar 11 till the dominant of bar 18. This involves an incredible tonic prolongation over three bars of dominant-centered harmony, *after* the  $e_3$  has (on the ‘surface’) emphatically moved to  $d_3$  (bar 15; the period bars 11-18 is divided neatly into four tonic plus four dominant). According to Schenkerian principles, the bass *Quartzug* C-G strengthens this tonic dependence. At bar 15 the initial ascending motive ( $c_3-d_3-e_3$ ) unites with the ‘parenthetical’ neighbour-note motive ( $g_3-a_3-g_3$ , then  $g_3-a_3-g_3$ ). The end of the descending line is not the  $d^2$  of bar 18, since it is more likely heard as resolving on the following bass note C; a ‘transferred resolution’.<sup>75</sup> A two-voice bias obscures the features of registral play characteristic of this etude.

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<sup>72</sup> cf. Schwab-Felisch (2005) p. 365-266

<sup>73</sup> cf. Narmour (1977) p. 55

<sup>74</sup> Schenker (1969) pp. 54-61

<sup>75</sup> On implied and transferred resolutions, see Rothstein (1991) p. 301.

(2) Motive has a stronger structural function in this etude than *Zug*: the dotted motive seems to retain its identity through various transformations (*Terz-Zug*, neighbour note, and appoggiatura in bars 34-35).

(3) An annotation in Schenker's analysis of bars 21-41 states that the term 'modulation' is inapt to describe the process. Then *what* does the  $I_4^6$ -V-I of bars 27-28 establish? – Evidently, the key of  $B_b$ , even though in context this key is not particularly stable. Bars 29-35 contain a *Quartschrittsequenz* (bars 33-35 invert the direction and double the pace, realizing *Zwischenfundamente* as appoggiaturas, thus creating the effect – in Schenkerian view, the cause – of parallel motion by major seconds.)

(4) The  $e_b^3$  ( $\hat{3}$ ) of bar 21 in the second level is connected to the  $d^3$  of bar 41 on the basis of a long range bass *Quartzug*  $C-B_b-A_b-G_1$ , which results from arbitrary eliminations: from  $B_b$  of bar 28 there is a jump to the  $A_b$  of bar 40, which is merely an inversion of the subdominant already active since bar 36. The importance of the subdominant is confirmed by the emphatic plagal cadence of the coda.

(5) Though the *Urlinie* does not form the bond between these sections (bar 21-41), I do not agree with the formal division proposed by Charles Smith (he locates it at bar 28-29 by interpreting the middle voice  $d^2$  of the B-flat triad of bar 28 as *Urlinie*  $\hat{2}$ , an interpretation hardly less "egregious" than any of Schenker's).<sup>76</sup> In spite of its exclamatory confirmation, it is not evident that this B-flat cadence has really brought us anywhere (B-flat minor-major being somewhat indefinite in relation to C minor; the staccato mark in the bass emphasizes its transitory nature). What do we mean saying that a piece is binary? – It is not a taxonomic drawer cabinet category like *this animal has two legs and two wings*. The most obvious referent is a major symmetry, parallelism, or major break dividing the composition. In simple cases, these converge. The obvious, and I think right choice is to follow the repeat structure: the main division is where the introduction recurs (bar 41), which is in accordance with Schenker's level 1.

It is above all the extension of the *Urlinie*  $\hat{1}$  as a determinant of formal division which makes *S* implausible. Carl Schachter discusses *In der Fremde* from Schumann's *Liederkreis* Op. 39 (No. 1) as an example of a prolonged closing I.<sup>77</sup> This aspect of his analysis is surely uncontroversial. A formal division according to *T* would discern three periods, the first (bars 1-9) in the tonic key of F-sharp minor, the second (bars 10-20) moving through A major and B minor, the third a tonic pedal. In the first period, vocal melody is built around the ascent-descent  $f\sharp^1-g\sharp^1-a^1$  and stepwise descent  $b^1-f\sharp^1$ . The second period initially extends the ascending interval to  $b^1$ , then to  $c\sharp^2$  and  $e^2$ . There is an obvious motivation in phrase structure for this, which supports the text. We may thus hear an overarching  $a^1-b^1-c\sharp^2-e^2$ , followed by a global descent to  $f\sharp^1$  (during which the initial melodic phrase is varied in the key of B minor, bars 16-19).

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<sup>76</sup> Smith (1996) p. 214: "[...] Schenker's formal misrepresentation of that piece is egregious."

<sup>77</sup> Schachter (1999) p. 23-24

**Example 6:** Schumann: *In der Fremde*, Liederkreis op. 39:1 (middleground graph, Schachter 1999 Ex. 1.6)

(1) Schachter's analysis outlines a I-IV-V-I *Baßbrechung*. Here, as in a great many cases, one may dispute the appropriateness of locating a key area (B minor) on the same structural level as a merely cadential V: a consequence of the chord-for-key *Stufe* principle. The harmonic outline would better be represented as I-IV-I.

(2) Schachter's  $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$  *Urlinie* accommodates the  $b^1$  as a neighbour note, creating a covered octave. Maybe to soften this Schachter promotes the  $b^1$  of bar 19 to higher status, though it is embedded in a descending line and  $b^1$  has been prominent from bar 10 onward.

(3) If a *Kopftone* has any reality in this song, it will certainly be  $a^1$ . But the  $a^1$  progresses to the  $b^1$  of bar 10 and onward; the *Urlinie*  $g^\sharp$  of bar 20 is part of a *phrase*  $a^1-g^\sharp-f^\sharp$  which *as a whole* relates backward, by stating the same descent of bar 18 one tone lower.

The sense of alienation, longing and substitute fulfilment of which the text speaks is perfectly realized in this song by clear structural means, with a high point in the exact middle at the crucially uncompleted modulation to A major on "*Da ruhe ich auch*". This event is not easily represented as a voice leading product, and as surface occurrence left out of the graph (the 'tonicization' of III is not shown).

## 5. The jealous triad

What kind of theory is *S*? – What sort of explanation does it offer? While Schenker saw his own work as prophetic, various alternatives have been proposed: dogmatic, axiomatic, psychological, empirical, pragmatic. With the paradigm varies the object of the theory: Schenker intended his theory as a kind of masterwork-test (its application would show the difference between masterwork and hackwork). With its reduction to pre-formed generality and its severe restriction of parameters, *S* is more

plausibly seen as an incomplete theory of tonality. It is not clear that it effectively discriminates masterworks from hackwork – except in the tautologous way, that as a tonal theory it discriminates basically diatonic tonal music from atonal or chromatic music.

(1) In orthodox presentations, Schenker-theory is no doubt dogmatic, with a dose of religion mixed into its aesthetics. Schenker's appeal to 'hearing' is for "whom hath ears to hear":

Indem ein Werk, werdend und geworden, im Hintergrunde nur *eine Ursache* bekennt, ist es wie *monotheistisch* gerichtet: Gleichsam Heiden sind deshalb jene, die schaffend oder nachschaffend nur den Vordergrund des Werkes gelten lassen und sich an seine Einzelheiten verlieren, Bekenner eines wahrhaft Göttlichen dagegen jene, die den Hintergrund verehren. Auch im Kunstwerk bleibt die eine Ursache im Hintergrund unwandelbar; eine Abweichung nach den Gelüsten der Vordergrund-Heiden ist Sünde wider den Geist des Monotheismus. Soll ich meine kunst-monotheistische Lehre deshalb etwa von einem Sinai verkünden und ihr Bekenner damit zu gewinnen suchen, daß ich Wunder tue? Nun, Wunder werden ja geschehen, denn der Glaube an den Zusammenhang wird die Musiker früher oder später hörend machen, wenngleich auch er aus Unbegabten niemals Talente wird machen können.

In der Erhebung des Geistes zum Ursatz ist eine fast religiös zu nennende Erhebung zu Gott und den Genies als seinen Mittlern enthalten, eine Erhebung im wörtlichen Verstande zum *Zusammenhang*, der nur bei Gott und den Genies ist.<sup>78</sup>

Schenker's triad is a jealous triad, which consumes all minor deities of tonal theory. All traditional metaphors for the tonic as embodiment of tonal coherence: point of attraction, stability, gravitation, vanishing point, are trumped by positing the triad as a generative entity. It is not clear what the *Ursatz* is, and no doubt it is different things to different theorists: matrix, model, prototype, 'basic idea',<sup>79</sup> symbol, description, abbreviated set of prescriptions. The associated theory is however irredeemably dogmatic in its absolute validity claims, coupled with vagueness about application criteria, about relevant knowledge and data, and its irrefutability by the demand of confirmatory 'hearing'.<sup>80</sup>

As for vagueness and arbitrariness, they have been presented as a virtue. Schachter pleads for irrationality:

[...] it is far from my intention to offer a 'method for the reading of diminutions' or, God help us, a 'theory of reduction.' I strongly doubt that such methods or theories can be made to work, for I believe that the understanding of detail begins with an intuitive grasp of large structure,

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<sup>78</sup> Schenker (1935) p. 18, 29

<sup>79</sup> Forte and Gilbert (1982) p. 131

<sup>80</sup> About Schenkerism as dogmatic, see Dahlhaus (1962); on the contrary Schwab (2005) p. 375 n. 230: "Diese Annahme kann 'falsifiziert' werden. Es gibt tonale Kompositionen ohne Urlinie."



however imperfect or incomplete, a process that is ultimately resistant to rigorous formulation.<sup>81</sup>

This informalism is in conflict with the rigidity and explanatory totalitarianism of the *Ursatz* principle:

The *Ursatz*, it must be remembered, is not only the final reduction of the piece's linear and harmonic contents; it is also the expression, in the piece, of fundamental properties of major/minor tonality. Among these properties are: the origin in the tonic triad of melodic and harmonic progressions, the stepwise character of melody, the harmonic primacy of the fifth relationship, and progression to the  $\hat{1}/I$  as final resolution.<sup>82</sup>

Thus: the properties of tonality are 'expressed' (I am not sure what that means) in the *Ursatz*, not as a principle but as a sounding phenomenon ('in the piece'). The *Ursatz* thus 'expresses' the tonic triad (which is not present in the *Ursatz* as such); the tonic triad is 'the origin' of melodic and harmonic progressions. The stepwise character of melody I would characterize as an overgeneralization (it results if we consider all harmonically reducible melodic intervals as 'essentially simultaneous'). Of all this, only the  $\hat{2}/V-\hat{1}/I$  conclusion (ignoring the  $\hat{7}/V-\hat{1}/I$ ) is, indeed, trivially, present in the *Ursatz*.

Thus seen, Schenkerian reduction is a reduction to increasing banality, dished up as a revelation of the divine. Inevitably, to lay bare by analysis the tonal foundation of any composition is working from the specific to the general. The erroneous idea is that most of what is specific and aesthetically interesting would somehow flow from tonal grammar as Schenker saw it. A common formulation of the criticism states that *S* propagates a static view of music. In the orthodox version, the reduction of complex relational phenomena to a simple 'thing' (the major triad) indeed seems to express a Parmenidean preference for the static, unmoving, unchanging. Schenker's motto *semper idem sed non eodem modo* formulates it very well: every masterwork expresses in various ways basically tonality (or the *Ursatz*). It seems the inversion of a more plausible and interesting dynamic view of structure: as seen in mathematics and physics, a limited set of simple entities subjected to transformation rules may lead to diverse, apparently unrelated, complex outcomes, displaying non-reductive regularities ('emergence'): *semper alterum eodem modo*.

To avoid this staticism, Schenkerians have switched from background adoration to middleground meditation.<sup>83</sup> Analysis does not serve to demonstrate the presence of the *Ursatz* (in circular fashion), but to show the specificity of the derivation as the aesthetically interesting factor. It leaves the problem, apart from a lack of analytic

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81 Schachter (1999) p. 122-123; Cohn and Dempster (1992) p. 168: "[...] Schenkerians elsewhere acknowledge [quoting Rothgeb] that "Schenkerian theory contains no prescriptions whatsoever regarding what 'can' and 'cannot' be done in 'reducing' a piece to its harmonic-contrapuntal structure" and are willing to accept a certain amount of circularity in their reductive procedure."

82 Schachter (1999) p. 27

83 See e.g. Cook (1987) p. 41, Schwab (2005) p. 375

criteria, that reduction proceeds by a too small set of principles, by arbitrary differentiations and imperceptible and senseless connections.

(2) A moderate position accepts Schenkerian orthodoxy minus the prophetic, leaving the artistic. Much emphasis has been laid on the fact that Schenkerian graphs are in notes. Thus William Benjamin calls Schenkerian analyses “artistic statements, *in music*, about music.”<sup>84</sup> This rests on a false equation of music and notes. If Schenker reductions can be taken seriously, it is certainly not as music: one only has to follow some Schenkerians’ advice and play them (Example 7). Reducing good music to bad chorales cannot be the point of analysis.

**Example 7:** ‘Performing version’ of Example 5b



I do not think it is *desirable* that music analysis should be ‘musical’ or take musical form – no more than that hydrodynamics should be watery, or demographics crowded. The language of theory is a meta-language, and its choice is determined by effectiveness. We cannot say anything *in* notes which cannot be expressed *by* notes – which is, by widespread agreement, not all that musically matters.

(3) An alternative is to treat as axiomatic what in Schenker is dogmatic. This he has hinted at himself, imagining his theory both complete and coherent:

Like the transformations, diminutions also originate by levels, and always with their specific dynamics as well. Every motive, like every dynamic condition, is in this way entirely verifiable and provable!<sup>85</sup>

- which it isn’t, witnessing wide variance in analyses and their arbitrary argumentation. The difference between dogmatic and axiomatic is logical formality, completeness, and explicitness. It seems to have been an appealing vision in the 1950s–70s. Milton Babbitt has stated with rash optimism that what was formulated by Schenker dogmatically is “completely acceptable as an axiomatic statement [...] of the dynamic nature of structural tonality.”<sup>86</sup> Forte and Gilbert call their Chapter 7 “Basic axioms”. This is a tribute to an aspiration which in their book is not fulfilled.<sup>87</sup> Much of Eugene Narmour’s critique of Schenkerism is directed at the fact that it *isn’t*

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<sup>84</sup> Benjamin (1981) p. 160; cf. the critique in Brown (2005) p. xvii and Agawu (1989) p. 285

<sup>85</sup> Schenker (1994) p. 109

<sup>86</sup> Babbitt (1952) p.

<sup>87</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss to what extent it has been or is being fulfilled in the partly Schenkerian approach of Lerdahl and Jackendoff (1983) and more recent attempts at automatic derivation; for current research, see the paper by Alan Marsden, <[http://ismir2007.ismir.net/proceedings/ISMIR2007\\_p055\\_marsden.pdf](http://ismir2007.ismir.net/proceedings/ISMIR2007_p055_marsden.pdf)>

axiomatic; the question is rather, *could it be?* – And is this desirable? Considering the leap to be made from intuition to formalism, the task is formidable; considering the arbitrariness and metaphysical obscurity involved in the theory, its desirability is dubious. It remains somewhat perplexing that Schenkerism has been embraced as a system in the same spirit as logicist-rationalist creations like *Principia mathematica*, the philosophy of Carnap, and generative grammar.

(4) The view that Schenkerism provides important *psychological* insights has little *prima facie* plausibility. Robert Snarrenberg expresses this view in his Schenker article in the *New Grove*, claiming that

Schenker's theory amounts to a probing analysis of musical cognition within the tradition of Western European music as practised in the 18th and 19th centuries.

To the extent that it is a theory of how mental prototypes shape musical perception, his theory is consistent in its approach with the most recent advances in the understanding of perception.

*Der freie Satz* is thus more of a treatise in music psychology than a textbook of analysis. Its principal topic is the conceptual structure of the triadically tonal musical mind.<sup>88</sup>

It thus hinges on the questions *what is a triadically tonal musical mind*, and *whose is?* – The first relates to Schenker's concept of linear 'motion' as creating effects of tension and relaxation, or 'striving and fulfilment'. Such a 'rubber band' view of music seems to me psychologically primitive and musically unappealing; which for my case answers the second question.

(5) Most surprising maybe is the interpretation of Schenkerism as empirically scientific, a view recently defended at book length by Matthew Brown.<sup>89</sup> It involves, I think, a series of misunderstandings about what constitutes scientific theory.

(5.1) *S* is supposed to be of an empirical, inductive nature, based on a generalization of phenomena under laws similar to laws of nature. To support this view, Brown refers to the allegedly empirical process of discovery by which Schenker shaped his ideas. This had already been argued by Milton Babbitt (in a passage connecting with the words quoted above):

The result [of superficial acquaintance with the *Urlinie*-concept] has been the widespread notion that the concept of the Urlinie came into being as an a priori, theoretical abstraction, fabricated from thin air, divorced from any aural motivation, and then employed as the rationale for deriving the remainder of the analytical method. Even a superficial investigation of Schenker's writings demonstrates the total untruth of this notion. The gradual evolution of his thought [...] reveals the constant growth, from the most tentative adumbrations, of the awareness of the basic continuity of the musical organism in terms of the correlation and interaction of the linear realization of a triadic span with the specific triadic harmonic articulations.

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88 R. Snarrenberg, *Schenker*, Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (accessed 6-6-8), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>> and Snarrenberg (1997). A similar two-dimensional psychology limits the approach of Lerdaahl and Jackendoff (1983).

89 Brown (2005), esp. p. 157.

Schenker's analysis originated in aural experience, and the *Urfinie* is, at least indirectly, of empirical origins. On the other hand, it is (and this is merely an additional merit) completely acceptable as an axiomatic statement (not necessarily the axiomatic statement) of the dynamic nature of structural tonality.<sup>90</sup>

If this were what matters, even cabala would count as empirical science. For the scientific character of a theory, the road of discovery is irrelevant. Had Newton discovered the connection between planetary motions and falling objects in a flash, by being hit on the head by an apple – so fine; what matters is the exactitude of his maths and the specificity of its application to phenomena; this makes it, crucially, falsifiable. There are two ways of falsifying *S* as a theory of musical structure by analysis (the falsification of claims about auditive perception is a different matter). The first is finding an uncontested tonal masterwork which does not allow of a plausible *Ursatz* reduction. I think that in this sense *S* has been falsified numerous times; the disagreement seems to be over *how false it should be*. Standard practice involves such arbitrary procedures that the *Ursatz* can trivially be extracted from any tonal piece. The second and more creative way would be to find or compose a piece which is execrable music, but lends itself to the construction of a superb graph. That might be an interesting assignment for Schenker classes.

(5.2) Music theory (as an analytical approach to a body of musical works) formulates rules of art, not something like natural laws. The rules of harmony and counterpoint are in many respects like rules of games, such as *not to touch the ball with the hands* in football, or *not with the feet* in handball; in other respects, like rules of grammar. Unlike natural law, which describes a regularity as some quantified relation between cause and effect, game rules and linguistic rules describe ‘how the game is played’ and what limitations apply to the options open to a player or speaker in a given situation. In music and in literature, there is of course an added dimension: unlike a tennis match, a composition is also considered a meaningful and expressive ‘work’: in short, a semiotic construct.

The relationship between rules of musical grammar, of linguistic grammar, and of games is a fascinating problem area, far too complicated to explore here. What matters for the moment is that it makes no sense to compare a rule of counterpoint, such as the rule that suspensions resolve by step, to natural law. Suspensions do not *occur*, they are *made* and their resolution is part of their making, not an effect of a cause. Thus, *pace* Brown, there are neither “initial conditions”, nor “lawlike generalizations”, nor “deductive” predictions, nor “causal connections” involved in a 7–6 suspension and its description.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Babbitt (1952) p. 260. Compare to this Smith (1996) p. 273: “Tellingly, in *Der freie Satz* Schenker revealed almost nothing about the process by which he arrived at this array of allowable backgrounds. Many different configurations were experimented with over the years of *Der Tonwille* and *Das Meisterwerk*, but most were dismissed - why? Presumably these structures were rejected because they were falsified somehow - but on what grounds could this have happened?”

<sup>91</sup> Brown (2005) p. 8-11; see the criticism in the review by Sheehan (2005)

As *science*, music theory goes beyond the presentation of rules-of-the-game (as in *S* and *T*), and studies how the game is in fact played (on the basis of those rules), and how the rules contribute to the success of the game. Scientific questions are questions of meta-theory: Does the theory reflect our perception of music? – Does it contribute to our understanding, especially in relation to other areas of human expression?

(5.3) It has been argued here and elsewhere that due to its dogmatic nature, *S* is unfalsifiable. Brown tries to get around the issue by referring to “recent findings in cognitive science”, which show “that scientists do not usually set out simply to falsify existing theories; on the contrary, they normally start out by seeking confirmatory data; only when this data has been obtained does it make sense to engage in rigorous falsification”. Of course they do, because if not, they would be falsifying dozens of futile theories a day – even before breakfast. As for Schenkerians, they seem never to *stop* confirming.

This point suggests that our understanding of what makes a successful music theory must eventually take account of the ways in which music theorists actually work, rather than simply relying on their logical or empirical content.<sup>92</sup>

In a way (sociologically), theory is what theorists do, but this in no way detracts from the falsifiability criterium, which is about demands on *theory* (which should be good for something), not about *what theorists do* (which after all might be good for nothing).

(6) A ‘liberal’, pragmatic view is probably the most common; it states: if Schenker analysis can be of some use – use it. One of its weaknesses, its reliance on intuitive judgment to fill the gaps in the formalism, is positively valued. The method is justified by insights gained in its application. Following this guideline rigorously, one might go touring Paris with a map of London: indeed one will get to know the city very well, but this does not imply that the London map is a true, effective, or plausible image of the French capital, or the best we can get. It matters whether theories are true, in the sense of being adequate in representing and relating facts, productive of new facts or insights, and falsifiable in the sense that constraints are sufficiently narrow to allow for situations where the theory *should* work, but *doesn’t*: where facts are harder than theorems.

[...] if, in analysis, the fundamental structure is regarded as a generalized characteristic of the composed music of triadic tonality, if it is regarded as a structural norm, as a construct which is always subject to modification when the structural events of a particular work do not support it, then surely a number of objections disappear.<sup>93</sup>

But which norms can be bended without breaking the theory? What makes *S* implausible and unfalsifiable are its central suppositions, without which the rest

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<sup>92</sup> Brown (2005) p. 17

<sup>93</sup> Forte (1959) p. 24

would collapse into a somewhat eccentric chords-for-keys version of *T*: the long range voice leading connections, and their *Ursatz* determination.

One pragmatist move rather resembling some forms of religious liberalism might be labelled ‘metaphorism’: call it all a metaphor and don’t ask *for what?*

Schenkerian analysis is in fact a kind of metaphor according to which a composition is seen as the large-scale embellishment of a simple underlying harmonic progression, or even as a massively expanded cadence; a metaphor according to which the same analytical principles that apply to cadences in strict counterpoint can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the large-scale harmonic structures of complete pieces.<sup>94</sup>

If this seductively simple and coherent vision of total-recursive form is a metaphor, then because tonal music is apparently not recursive, really; so why the metaphor? Cook makes a kind of sociological defense of pragmatism in music theory: it is for the community; without shared conventions one theorist wouldn’t understand another.<sup>95</sup> One would hope that music theorists are not making music theory in order to communicate with other music theorists, but to gain deeper understanding of *problems* – problems that *matter*.

(7) Schenkerism’s generative character, though dubious, has attractions to those who suspect that the language-like aspects of classical music might be explained by a hierarchy similar to that in generative linguistics. Schenker compared his teachings to school grammar:

Meine Lehre bringt zum erstenmal eine wirkliche *Ton-Sprachlehre*, ähnlich der Sprachlehre, wie sie in den Schulen vorgetragen wird.<sup>96</sup>

In this essay *S* has been represented as a series of substitutions. At their basis is the metaphysical thing-for-relation or concrete-for-abstract substitution. To the secondary substitutions discussed (chord for key, voice leading for harmonic connection) might be added *syntax for grammar*. Linguistic grammar comprises a number of parameters, which somehow have to be coordinated with syntax; a task which still keeps the linguistic world divided. Generative grammar has come into a phase where its limited focus on syntax (‘syntactocentrism’) is often perceived to be a serious defect.<sup>97</sup> A similar complaint can be made against Schenkerism, even if its basic premises had been more successful in accounting for musical syntax. It narrows down the tonal process in a way that marginalizes other aspects: phrase building, texture, and above all rhythm. Schenker’s cerebral bias against the physical origin and correlates of rhythm is at the heart of the theory. I don’t think Schenker’s theory of the origin of rhythm in an adjustment (*Ausgleich*) of contrapuntal notes in two voices merits serious attention:

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<sup>94</sup> Cook (1987) p. 36

<sup>95</sup> Cook (1987) p. 58

<sup>96</sup> Schenker (1935) p. 37

<sup>97</sup> Jackendoff (2002) p. 107

[...] Die Notwendigkeit, zwischen den Tönen der Züge, deren Zahl verschieden sein kann, drei, fünf oder acht, einen Ausgleich zu schaffen, führt zum erstenmal zu einem musikeigenen *Rhythmus*.

*Die Wurzel des musikalischen Rhythmus liegt also im Kontrapunkt!* Da es so ist, ist der musikalische Rhythmus nicht zu ertanzen, zu erturnen, nur der heute so verwahrloste Musiksinn konnte auf diese albernsten Mittel verfallen.

Mit den späteren Schichten wandelt sich entsprechend auch der Rhythmus, bis er, noch immer im Kontrapunkt verankert, durch Hinzutreten des Metrums seine letzte Vordergrundfassung erhält.<sup>98</sup>

Even within Schenker's ethno-historicist perspective, it has been falsified by Example 2 and by the facts that (1) a given number of notes can be rhythmicized in numerous ways; (2) rhythm in classical music is not additive: composers often select notes in a pattern to fit the metre.

Linguistic syntax is involved with semantics both by a partial dependency, and by co-determination (grammatical categories correspond roughly to concepts of kind: entity, action, relation). Without proposing any rigorous parallelism, the grammar of tonality may be said to have a semantic component (Forkel's *Logik*, Riemann's *Tonvorstellungen*), which resides (in part) in the functional relations between components.<sup>99</sup> Sounds refer to musical concepts, *Tonvorstellungen*; musical concepts refer to other musical concepts and to an infinite though somewhat indeterminate world of extramusical concepts and experiences. A great semantic potential resides in melody. The Schenkerian voice-leading hierarchy flattens out these diverse functional relations in the equipoise of voice leading progressions.

The music-as-language paradigm has suffered much from metaphorical talk and overgeneralization. The language-like character of the music of the classical era and the 'emancipation' of its instrumental music may be more plausibly explained not as music realizing its 'true nature', but as the emulation of our linguistic abilities by an art which shares with language some of the mental faculties involved, while specializing in others.

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<sup>98</sup> Schenker (1935) p. 65

<sup>99</sup> Dahlhaus (1971) p. 214: "[...] daß Musik es erlaubt, sich über ihre semantische Schicht hinweg zu setzen und zu täuschen, ist einer der Gründe, warum die Bemühung um eine Theorie der Musik, die sich als Theorie der Tonbedeutungen und –funktionen versteht, nicht so unmittelbar einleuchtet wie die analoge um die Syntax und Semantik der Sprache."

## Abstract

Schenkerian theory causes a major divide in the world of music theory. What seems to proponents a sensible, valid or enlightening view of the structure of tonal music, is considered implausible and often irrational by opponents. Where difference of opinions is fundamental, there is need of debate. To prevent such a debate from running aground in analytical detail, it is necessary to lay bare the aesthetic, epistemological and ontological presuppositions underlying analytical judgments.

‘Schenkerism’ is discussed in the form of a hypothetical set of propositions *S*, which should stand to the test of adequately representing common Schenkerian notions. This is compared to a parallel set *T*, representing mainstream non-Schenkerian notions in the theory of tonality.

*S* emerges as the product of a series of conceptual substitutions. The most basic is the metaphysical thing-for-relation or concrete-for-abstract substitution. This becomes concrete in secondary, specific substitutions: (1) chord for key, (2) voice leading for harmonic connection and (3), in the context of the music-as-language paradigm, syntax for grammar. *S* fails as a method of analysis because of a conflict between the absoluteness of its guiding principles and the arbitrariness of their analytic application. As a theory of tonality, *S* presents a distorted grammar, which offers no opportunity for an integrated theory of musical form and expression.



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