

The background of the cover features a complex musical score in a light purple color. It includes various musical elements such as staves, notes, rests, and beams. Some notes are connected by dashed lines, suggesting a specific analytical perspective. The notation is dense and spans the entire width and height of the cover, providing a rich, textured backdrop for the text.

Unfoldings

Essays in Schenkerian Theory and Analysis

Carl Schachter

Edited by Joseph N. Straus

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*Essays in
Schenkerian Theory
and Analysis*



CARL SCHACHTER

Edited by Joseph N. Straus

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A Dialogue between Author and Editor



Editor's Note: This book gathers a selection of Carl Schachter's most important and representative essays from the past thirty years. He and I have made some slight adjustments—to correct a very small number of minor errors, to create stylistic uniformity, and to supplement the notes with references to more recent publications, particularly English translations of Schenker—but, for the most part, these essays are reprinted in their original form. We begin with three essays on rhythm, because these represent arguably Schachter's most important and original work. The four essays that follow engage different aspects of Schenkerian theory, as does, indeed, all of Schachter's work. These are followed by two essays on musical text-setting and two extended studies of individual works. We have not attempted to arrange the essays into a pedagogical order—it is hard to imagine what a suitable one would be—but readers may approach these essays in whatever way seems congenial. Each is reasonably self-contained (although the three essays on rhythm form a single unit) and permeated by a shared set of concerns. Each takes Schenker's work as an indispensable point of departure, offers close readings of important works from the tonal literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and engages questions of musical expression, meaning, and interpretation. Methodological issues are discussed and Schenker's theory is extended, most notably in the three essays on rhythm, but the focus is much more on the music than on the methodology. As Schachter says, "Though I'm deeply interested in Schenker, I'm still more interested in Mozart and Beethoven."

In lieu of the usual editor's preface and author's introduction, we offer the following dialogue. Second thoughts, recent revisions, and biographical, historical, pedagogical, and philosophical speculations are all contained herein.

JS: What was the nature of your early musical training?

CS: Well, it was very early, and it was studying the piano. I started taking piano lessons at the age of five, and supplemented that when I got into my teens with violin and viola, al-

though not very seriously. At the same time as I was studying the violin and viola, I did have theory lessons—I studied the Piston book, so I had a basis in traditional harmony. Then, my piano teacher in New York, Isabelle Vengerova, sent me to Mannes for theory and ear-training. Eventually I became a full-time student there, with a major in conducting. It was quite by accident that I was introduced to Schenker—it was simply because I went to Mannes and worked with Felix Salzer, who was there.

JS: So your turn to music analysis came simultaneously with your exposure to Schenker.

CS: Yes, absolutely. And even that was somewhat accidental. That is, I was thinking of pursuing a career in conducting, but I was offered a job teaching at Mannes even before I had quite finished my studies there. I thought that was going to be a temporary thing, but I got really fascinated with it and decided that was what I wanted to do.

JS: What was the nature of your early work with Salzer?

CS: I studied counterpoint with him. He didn't like to talk about harmony as a discipline in itself, but we did all kinds of melody and bass settings and things of that sort, both written and at the keyboard. I had two years of analysis class with Salzer; I also studied music history with him. He was a very comprehensively educated musician, and so he taught everything other than subjects like orchestration or dictation or sight-singing. My basic musical training was with him.

JS: Did you have contact with proponents of Schenkerian theory other than Salzer?

CS: Not at that stage. Somewhat later, I was introduced to Oswald Jonas in Chicago. I didn't know him well, but he did invite me to have dinner at his house once. We had a very nice talk, but hardly about music at all. Quite a bit later than that, I became a close personal friend of Ernst Oster, and learned really a great deal from him without ever having had a lesson with him. We had many discussions about music, and that was an important part of my musical education. But this would have been in the late '60s or early '70s, so I would already have been in my thirties. We maintained a very close friendship; we talked almost every day on the phone.

JS: Were there any other members of the Schenkerian community who were particularly influential on your own development?

CS: Well, certainly William Mitchell, who was a friend of mine and who taught for a while at Mannes. He was an extraordinarily knowledgeable person too little remembered, in my opinion. I also got to know Allen Forte at that time—he was briefly at Mannes. When I first knew him, he was very much involved in Schenkerian theory, and was starting a translation of *Free Composition*. He was interested in twentieth-century theory at that time, too, but that really developed fully much later.

JS: There's been a lot of talk recently about developing an appropriate Schenker pedagogy. Since you've taught this subject for many years, how do you do it, and how do you think it should be done?

CS: Well, first of all, it shouldn't start too soon. I don't think students should begin work in Schenkerian analysis without having a thorough grounding in counterpoint, without being able to realize a figured-bass or set a chorale melody or a melody in some other style. All of

those things are necessary to give students the capability of making analytical judgments, so I would say students should probably have at least two years of theoretical work before work in Schenkerian analysis begins.

I usually start with a big piece, sometimes a Beethoven sonata movement, most often the D-minor Fantasy of Mozart. I try to give the basic outlines of the approach through several class sessions devoted to discussing that piece. One can show, for example, the composing-out of chords; one can show linear as well as harmonic elements in a bass line; one can show large-scale melodic fluency in the upper voice; one can show really quite wonderful motivic parallelisms and hidden repetitions. Jonas had a brilliant analysis of the D-minor Fantasy in which he showed how the Neapolitan sixth chord in the introductory Andante is left out of the main idea of the piece, in the Adagio, so that the piece becomes a kind of search for that lost Neapolitan, which then comes back in the reprise just before the turn to D major. So, one can also show how resolution can be postponed and tension built up and then eventually dispelled in a piece.

The next thing I do is what I call figured-bass reduction. I take pieces in a kind of articulated chordal texture, such as some of the preludes from Book I of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, possibly the Prelude from the G-major cello suite of Bach, maybe parts of some Chopin etudes or preludes, and have the students reduce them to a bass line with figured-bass symbols, or possibly a kind of four-part texture including the bass with the top voice that reproduces at least the main outlines of the melodic line. It's very useful for students to work bar by bar that way. That is, I do these figured-bass reductions in real-time, in the rhythm of the actual composition.

After that, one can start doing real graphs of parts of pieces. I usually start with phrases that have a kind of *Ursatz*-like structure—very often they might be themes from Mozart or early Beethoven sonatas. I concentrate on the bass first, but then get into the upper voice, showing its basic structure, then getting into all the different kinds of melodic prolongations, and then gradually increasing the analytical spans and getting to short entire pieces in different forms.

If one teaches a one-year or one-semester Schenker course, one has to try to get to some really big and complex pieces, but the problem is that the students aren't really ready to do them on their own. So, if one does that, then the teacher has to do a good deal of the work and give the students smaller tasks, let's say the bass line of the development section or something of that kind, and gradually build up the piece in that way. At Mannes, where there is a two-year undergraduate Schenker requirement for most students, one can eventually get to big pieces that the students can do on their own, and that's much more satisfactory. Of course, in a doctoral program, it is possible for students to go much further, and acquire much more fluency and self-confidence.

JS: Do you focus directly on specific technical issues—unfoldings, initial ascents, things of that kind—or do you let them come out of the literature you study?

CS: They come out of the literature. I try not to get the students in the habit of looking for a specific device, but rather to respond to the music and try to derive from the music what seems to be a proper understanding. I will sometimes, after we've gone through a number of excerpts, give them a list of abstract possibilities of unfolding or reaching-over or transfers of register up and down and all the different kinds of linear progressions, but that's

after they've already begun to acquire a technical vocabulary. It doesn't hurt for them to look at certain schemata of that kind.

JS: To what extent can or should a Schenkerian orientation percolate down to teaching the most elementary aspects of music theory?

CS: Well, very much, I think. That is, I think one should teach elementary harmony and counterpoint in a way that would be compatible with going on eventually into Schenkerian analysis. And I think students will learn the harmony and counterpoint better if they understand it in some kind of larger musical context rather than in a sort of watertight compartment. So in the two books that I'm co-author of, *Counterpoint in Composition*, with Felix Salzer, and *Harmony and Voice Leading*, with Edward Aldwell, my co-authors and I have certainly tried to teach these elementary things in a way compatible with Schenkerian insights.

Basic training in theory is certainly made more interesting and meaningful if the students are introduced to ideas of the linear functions of chords, of large-scale harmonic progression, and of modulation as the outgrowth of a basically monotonal structure. Simple bar-by-bar reductions of surface figurations are also useful and valuable exercises. But to attempt systematic training in reduction at an early stage is not only not useful—it can be quite harmful, in my view.

JS: Do you think of Schenkerian theory as a discipline for only the select few, or is it something that could be of value to musicians more generally?

CS: I think it's both. Really being able to do work on one's own requires first of all a certain talent for it and second of all a commitment, and those are not qualities that every professional musician or serious music student can be expected to have. So that aspect of the study is, I think, for the few, essentially a self-chosen few. On the other hand, I think that there's a great deal that any music student, or even music lover, could benefit from through exposure to these ideas, and they should at least be made available to musicians more generally.

JS: Including performers?

CS: Especially including performers. Again, it's not easy for a performer, who has to spend hours every day simply honing performing skills, to devote the time necessary to become really expert at the analysis, but having some idea of the principles I think is of benefit to any performer.

JS: Why study Schenker?

CS: Essentially for three reasons: to get a better hearing and understanding of specific pieces of music, to improve one's musical skills, and to learn about the structure of the tonal system at large. To go very far with the last of these requires a lot of rigorous and systematic thinking, and it's not for everybody. This is one of the things that really is for the few. It's mainly for graduate students with a specialist's interest in theory. To overemphasize *these* aspects of the theory at an early stage is to do more harm than good, I think. Of course, even at the earliest stages, students need to learn to avoid self-contradictory readings and confusions of levels—for example, analyzing an appoggiatura as being of greater value than its resolution—so there's a theoretical component even at the earliest stages. But at the early stages I'd rely as much as possible on the students' intuitive musicality and knowledge of voice leading and harmony.

JS: In some of your early articles in this collection, you have a rather pessimistic view of the status of Schenker and Schenkerian theory in the musical world at large. I wonder if your attitude toward that has changed in the intervening years.

CS: Well, Schenker's work is very much better known now than it was twenty years ago. Of course, there was the publication of *Free Composition* in 1979, which was probably the biggest single influence in a wider dissemination of Schenker's ideas, but now even his earlier works, including some that have not been translated into English, are getting much more attention. When I wrote in the second of my articles on rhythm that the rhythmic reduction that Schenker did in his analysis of Beethoven's Op. 2, No. 1, was an aspect of his work that hardly anybody knows, I was being quite accurate. It wouldn't be accurate now. Many people know *Tonwille* and *Meisterwerk*. So people certainly known more about Schenker now, and that includes his work on rhythm.

The whole field of rhythm has opened up really wonderfully in the last fifteen years or so. There's outstanding recent work by William Rothstein and Charles Burkhart. And there's work by people who are not, strictly speaking, Schenkerian, for example, Joel Lester, or Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, whose work impinges also on Schenkerian thought and definitely belongs in any kind of dialogue about an analysis of rhythm. And then there are younger scholars who are doing really valuable work. So that's a big, big change.

JS: I want to ask you about some of the unfinished business that you see ahead of us. More than twenty-five years ago, Allen Forte set a five-part agenda that included constructing a theory of rhythm for tonal music, determining the sources and development of triadic tonality, getting information about compositional technique, improving theory instruction, and understanding the structure of problematic modern works. To what extent does that agenda remain unfinished, and are there items that you'd like to add at this point?

CS: First of all, the entire enterprise is unfinished and will always remain so. As long as there is an interest in tonal music there will be no end to inquiry and investigation and the development of ideas. We've gone quite far along some of the paths that Forte has indicated, including rhythm above all.

As for tracing the sources of the tonal system and the ways in which it developed, that of course requires a kind of connection between analysis and theory on the one hand and history on the other. That's gone less far than I think it ought to have. Salzer was the person who began that, and it was continued most notably by Saul Novack. There are a few younger scholars who are working along these lines, but there is a signal lack of interest on the part of most musicologists in analysis, James Webster being an outstanding exception. That's an area where I wish still more would be done.

As for gaining insight into compositional techniques, there has been a lot of work of that type: sketch and manuscript studies; some kinds of analytical monographs, either on specific pieces or on categories of pieces. But this is something that will be built up in increments—it's not something that you can do in a global way. I think it gathers to a greatness slowly, and that's something that makes it not so easy to see quite how far one has gone, but I think there has been good progress.

With regard to improving theory instruction, I think Schenker's influence has been a good one, beginning even before his death. There are German works of the pre-Hitler period where the notion of composing-out of chords is mentioned, and of course in this country long

before Forte's article we had the harmony book of William Mitchell, and later Forte's own harmony book, and Roger Sessions's *Harmonic Practice*, which acknowledges it owes a debt to Schenker. There are some pedagogical trends influenced by Schenker that I don't like very much—the attempt at being too rigorous too early seems to me not a healthy thing—but on the whole I would say that a lot of progress has been made.

As for understanding problematic twentieth-century works, I may not be the right one to answer that. Nonetheless, good work has certainly been done on the transitional music that lies between tonality and atonality—music that I think Forte also had in mind. This is a controversial area, one about which there's not any general agreement, but very good people have published in this area.

I'd also say that there is some unfinished business that Forte didn't mention. I am thinking first of all of the study of Schenker's own work in historical context, that is, its development in itself, its relation to the history of music theory, and its relation also to wider intellectual and especially philosophical tendencies, traditions, and trends. A lot of important research has gone into that, and that's been augmented more recently by the availability of Schenker's *Nachlass*. Indeed, the study of Schenker's unpublished work has become a sort of sub-specialty.

Then there's the study of Schenker and performance, something which was a major preoccupation of Schenker himself, but which none of his followers until very recently have addressed themselves to very much. Building a bridge between performing musicians and analytical work is, I think, a very important thing, not easy to achieve, but something worthwhile achieving.

The relationship between Schenker and a possible tonal music of the future is also worth exploring. Schenker's approach never was and never can be a method of composition, but there are people currently writing some kind of tonal music, just as there have been all throughout the twentieth century, and just as representational painting never died out. If anything, the writing of tonal music, like the painting of representational pictures, has been on the increase in recent years, and I think for composers to gain some insights into the nature of tonality and into the way tonal materials were used by the great composers could conceivably have an impact on the way they write. I don't see that that influence has been a very important one, but maybe in the future it will be.

And there's yet another area that I think is worth exploring, and that is the combination of careful and rigorous studies of tonal structure with attention to other aspects of the composition, including the possibility of a kind of narrative structure, texture, orchestration, and other, you might say, secondary qualities of the music. It's something that I think is being done increasingly and that my own work does to some extent, and I think it's definitely worth following up.

js: So you would not accept the characterization of Schenker as an unredeemable formalist?

cs: No, not at all. There is obviously a strong formalist component to his work, but something like his analysis of the Chaos music from Haydn's *Creation* shows a wonderful awareness of the expressive possibilities of a work of music, and there are other examples all throughout his writings.

js: There's been a lot of talk in recent years about the status of the motive in Schenker's work, particularly its status in making analytical decisions. That is, to what extent should

analytical choices be influenced by a desire to find a particularly interesting motivic relationship?

CS: Well, that's always a temptation, and sometimes it's a temptation that needs to be resisted, because if that structure that one would infer in order to show an interesting motivic relationship isn't confirmed in the harmony and voice leading of its own immediate context, then the connection of the motive to its purported derivative is dubious. Nevertheless, even though one has to exercise caution, it is a very important part of the analytical process. One just needs to use a little common sense and good judgment, and not get carried away with enthusiasm for one's own ideas.

JS: When there's a conflict between harmony and voice leading on the one hand, and the motive on the other, is that a conflict that always needs to be resolved? Is it a conflict that always has to be resolved in one direction?

CS: Sometimes it's resolved and sometimes not, as we can see when the intervallic contents of a motive are not quite congruent with the tonic chord of the primary or local key. Ernst Oster had a fascinating unpublished reading of Brahms's *Intermezzo* in A Minor, Op. 118, No. 1. The first large harmonic unit composes out C major, which is III in the A-minor key, but the initial melodic idea is C–B \flat –A–E, and the C–A–E suggests an arpeggiated A-minor chord. The emphasized A creates friction with its C-major surroundings. Does it resolve? Yes! The key eventually confirms the motive, and the first big harmony is eventually understood as the beginning of an auxiliary cadence in A minor. The rather indefinite feeling of key at the beginning is supplanted by a really crystallized A minor, and the C–A of the opening melodic line is the first hint of that outcome, even before A minor is felt as a tonic.

In Chopin's *Mazurka* in G \sharp Minor, Op. 33, No. 1, the conflict occurs in the B-major middle section of its ABA form, and I don't think it's resolved. The top voice states an almost note-for-note paraphrase of the main outlines of the opening four measures, whose G \sharp -minor features (specifically the fourth D \sharp –G \sharp) fit a bit uncomfortably into the B-major context. The motivic allusion clouds the brightness of the B major with a shadow of the opening G \sharp minor, probably for narrative and expressive reasons. Chopin did not provide a tempo indication for the *Mazurka*, but called it "Mesto," "sad." Although the G \sharp minor comes back, the reprise of the opening doesn't really resolve the tension between motive and harmony in the B-minor part. That's because the *da capo* takes us back to the "Mesto" opening state (and home key) of the piece rather than forming the culmination of a continuous process of key definition, as in the Brahms.

Now in my analysis of the Chopin *Fantasy* in Chapter 11 of this book, I show a resolution of harmonic/motivic conflict very different from the one in the Brahms. What I call "motive x," the descending fourth F–E \flat –D \flat –C, strongly expresses the F minor of the opening section, but conflicts with the culminating and primary key of A \flat major. When the same fourth appears over the final cadence, the F is reduced to a neighbor-note, thus adjusting the motive to the key of A \flat : the motive's governing interval is now the third E \flat –C. This resolution is exactly opposite in meaning to the one in the Brahms *Intermezzo*. Here the motive changes its structure to conform to the harmony; in the Brahms, the harmony changes its focus in conformity with the motive.

JS: Is there any need in your view for a standardized Schenkerian notation, or should we celebrate diversity in this area?

CS: Well, I much prefer diversity to uniformity in graphing, except for pedagogical purposes in the beginning stages of study. Schenker's own graphs are so expressive partly because he used his graphic symbols so freely.

JS: Are there any notational symbols that you would rule out of court? There are certain things that don't seem to be used anymore, like different stem lengths, for example.

CS: Informally, I do use them sometimes, but it's impossible to use them in a very systematic way. That's because it's not clear whether stem length should be understood as the length per se of the stem or the height to which the stem is drawn, since notes fall on different parts of the staff. But to give a kind of emphasis to something by giving it a longer stem does seem to me a valid expressive thing to do. For some years, I have tended not to use the dotted beam that Salzer used so often. I prefer the beam to convey a sense of forward motion, and therefore I'm not so fond of the breaks that the dots create. So I prefer the dotted tie to the dotted beam, but that's not too important.

JS: How committed are you to the three standard forms of the *Ursatz*?

CS: I'm interested in the *Ursatz* largely because Schenker's description in Part I of *Free Composition* reveals some of the fundamental characteristics of the tonal system. In other words, the three *Ursatz* forms would be the simplest pieces of tonal music, so simple that they have no artistic value at all, but still fulfill some of the basic needs of a tonal piece. I think that a two-part outer-voice framework is one of the fundamental characteristics of tonal music. I think that the notion that one achieves the strongest resolution to the tonic note through a descending melodic motion is another one. So I'm not in a rush to add new *Ursatz* forms.

Of course one can occasionally find a piece that seems anomalous in this way. For example, in the storm movement from Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, which I analyze in Chapter 6 of this book, I hear the top voice as an *Anstieg*, or initial ascent, F–G–A; in that sense the movement would be a kind of expansion of what one would normally get just in the opening part of a composition. I have, although not in this book, an analysis of the opening Prelude from Bach's Fourth Cello Suite, and there I see the *Urlinie* covered under a prominent rising fourth, essentially a middle-voice progression superimposed on the structural top voice. But the sense of large-scale resolution comes from the *Urlinie*, not the rising fourth, and I prefer to regard the fourth as appearing at a later level.

JS: There have been many attempts in recent years to revise Schenker and move beyond Schenkerism. To what extent do you see yourself as a Schenker revisionist?

CS: Any approach is going to change as different people practice it over time, or as the same person practices it over time. Schenker's own approach was in a constant state of evolution, and even those followers who are considered orthodox did things differently from Schenker himself. For example, Ernst Oster's explanation of sonata form movements with $\hat{5}$ -lines and inner-voice progressions of $\hat{3}$ – $\hat{2}$ permits much more convincing readings of some pieces than Schenker's standard interruption theory allows. The various attempts by Salzer, Travis, and Laufer to modify the approach in order to deal with later repertory are perfectly legitimate. I have to say that though I'm deeply interested in Schenker, I'm still more interested in Mozart and Beethoven, and I find that the approach of the later Schenker gives me a perfectly satisfactory framework for developing my ideas about the music. I have yet to see that drastic revisions of Schenker have led to analyses that are as good as his own best readings,

and that for me is the proof of the pudding. And yet I would have to say that there are aspects of his theory that fail to convince me, some of which—his treatment of modulation, for example—I discuss in these essays. A general point: he tends to favor simple and unitary higher-level explanations for foreground phenomena. In a melodic line D–E–C over V–I in C major, he would call the E an anticipation, not a neighbor-note. But why not both? An anticipation of the following harmony and a neighbor, incomplete, of the preceding melodic tone. He seemed to want the higher levels to be a kind of Platonic realm of certainty; I'm willing to get my sense of security, much more contingent than his, from the whole panoply of levels in their interaction, and I'm willing to accept some uncertainty at the basis of things. Still, if I'm a Schenker revisionist, it's to a rather small extent and, I think, within the central tradition.

js: I suppose in a sense we're all Schenker revisionists insofar as the process that Rothstein describes as "the Americanization of Schenker" has already radically transformed who and what Schenker appears to us to be. Do you feel that that's the case? That Schenker has been so thoroughly Americanized as to be in a sense unrecognizable?

cs: No, I don't feel that, but certainly the approach has changed through its transplantation to these shores. Here I think first of the vocabulary of the technical terminology. The German terms that Schenker used are basically normal German words, some of them cobbled together for Schenker's purposes, like *Untergreifen*. Unfortunately, there is no way that we could get an English equivalent to a word like *Zug*—it just doesn't exist in the English language. It's very similar to Freud's vocabulary. Freud speaks of "das Ich," which doesn't seem to make sense in English as "the I," so it has been translated as "ego," using a Latin word. Some years ago, Bruno Bettelheim criticized the English-language Freudian vocabulary for being too objective and quasi scientific, but I'm afraid that's a little bit in the nature of the English language. One solution, which some people prefer, involves using just the German terms, but even that distances them from an English-speaking person in a way that would not be the case for a German speaker. There's definitely a vitalistic component, quite a wonderful one, I think, of Schenker's language that becomes a bit denatured through the English vocabulary, and while that doesn't change the notational symbols in the graphs, it may change the way people hear them and think about them, and not for the better. As far as I'm concerned, the only way of counteracting that is by stressing as much as possible the aesthetic and perceptual components of the analysis rather than simply the concepts that are there, and I think the best teaching of Schenker in this country, in fact, does that. Apparently, Schenker taught at the piano and played the graphs in order to get people to hear what they meant.

js: Schenker espoused political and social views that probably strike us as unattractive, to say the least. What has been the impact on Schenker's own theoretical work and its adherents of his dreadful politics?

cs: Of course they related to his theoretical work. His tendency to dismiss any music not composed by "geniuses" certainly connects to his anti-democratic stance. And his restricting his analyses to mostly German composers is at least compatible with his pan-German nationalism. But let's not forget that his eleven geniuses—nine of them German—wrote a large proportion of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music, other than opera, that has survived in the repertory. Tovey cast a wider net than Schenker, but if we removed

Schenker's composers from *Essays in Musical Analysis* there would be very little left. And Schenker himself wrote appreciatively, though not always in his published writings, about Tchaikovsky, Strauss, Bruckner, Rossini, Puccini, Smetana, Bizet, Gounod, and others. He was less narrow than one might think. Of course the organicism and idealism of his approach is more compatible with German intellectual traditions than with British empiricism, but I hesitate to say that that's why he delighted in tracing hidden motivic parallelisms that Tovey would certainly reject. Maybe, but I'm not sure. The first generation of Schenkerians whom I knew—Salzer and Oster especially—hated Schenker's chauvinism and reactionary politics, but their musical thinking was, in different ways, very much in his tradition.

JS: In Chapter 3 of this book, you say that "the goal of analysis is to find the best reading one can, not merely to find a solution that somehow 'works.'" In this postmodern age, how firmly do you still cling to the notion that some readings are simply better than others? Are there correct and incorrect interpretations? Better and worse ones?

CS: Yes to both questions. First, as to "incorrect." Take a melodic line E–D–C–B–C: a reading that showed the first C as passing between D and B, probably over a V chord, and that simultaneously showed the two Cs structurally connected as a retained tone would be self-contradictory and incorrect. C can't be both a passing tone and a retained main tone at the same level. Now about "better and worse." A reading that failed to take into account the specific individual features of a work—its motivic design, formal idiosyncrasies, textures, and so forth—is worse than one that does account for such features. In *Free Composition*, the analysis of the first-movement development of Beethoven's Sonata, Op. 14, No. 2, is unsatisfactory because the salient thematic and harmonic event—the "false recapitulation" in E \flat —is virtually ignored, and two arpeggiated bass progressions are posited which receive little confirmation in the design and in the harmony. I suspect that Schenker inferred a connection between his large-scale arpeggios and the left-hand accompaniment figure at the beginning of the movement, but that connection would only be valid if the arpeggios form a convincing middleground structure in their immediate context, and they don't.

I think one searches for the reading that will encompass all of the important aspects of the piece in a satisfactory way. Obviously, there's no end to such a search. One might think one has come up with the best reading and realize—sometimes because a student will point something out—that there's a whole dimension of the piece that one hasn't addressed. I also feel that not trying to achieve something more than just mere correctness or plausibility weakens one's work as an analyst.

JS: This would seem to raise the issue of musical ambiguity. In Chapter 4 of this book, you say, "This is not to deny the possibility that ambiguity and multiple meanings might exist in tonal music; they certainly do exist. But their function, in my opinion, is more narrowly circumscribed than some analysts . . . believe." Are there musical situations that are ambiguous all the way down, that can never be resolved in a satisfactory way?

CS: There are two separate problems here, one having to do with the process of analysis and the other having to do with ambiguous features in a composition. I do sometimes find situations where I can't quite decide whether one or another reading is appropriate. This can occasionally happen in that bugbear of beginning students: is it a $\hat{3}$ -line or a $\hat{5}$ -line. Even Schenker apparently had a file labeled something like " $\hat{3}?$ – $\hat{5}?$ – $\hat{8}?$ " Curiously, when this decision is really difficult, it's often not so important to decide. Once one gets beyond the first

middleground level, the significant features of a piece may well have the same meaning and function with either *Ursatz* form; if they don't, the decision is usually pretty clear. Schenker's very interesting reading of the "Haffner" Symphony slow movement is from $\hat{3}$. I prefer reading it from $\hat{5}$, but I don't think for that reason that my analysis is significantly better than his.

Schenker himself points to the possibility of confusing IV and II. For instance, should one infer two *Stufen*, IV and II, or simply IV with a contrapuntal 5–6 motion above the bass? Often it doesn't matter much. That's because a genuine kind of double meaning in tonal music is that some events are at once harmonic and contrapuntal structures. Roman I–VI–II–V–I can also be understood as Arabic 5–6–5–6–6 above a rising bass $\hat{1}$ – $\hat{2}$ – $\hat{3}$. I usually prefer to take the contrapuntal perspective as primary unless we are dealing with a cadential progression, but the harmonic one is not necessarily invalid. Ernst Oster used to say that ultimately you can't completely separate harmony and counterpoint, important though it is to make the separation as much as possible when teaching the disciplines.

And this brings us to ambiguities that are inherent in the compositional situation, above all, enharmonics. In Schubert's "Nacht und Träume" (discussed in Chapter 8), the prolonged G major is the outgrowth of an F \times functioning as a chromatic passing tone. If we take the background meaning as primary, the ambiguity is resolved; the tone is really an F \times . But the interest of the passage arises out of the conflict between that background function and the foreground impression of a G-major chord. The transient chromatic passing tone appears to be the root of an extended consonant triad, much as the fleeting insubstantial world of a dream appears to the dreamer like the real world. Resolving the F \times –G ambiguity in favor of F \times is a necessary part of understanding the passage, but it's only a part. A more comprehensive understanding involves the simultaneous contemplation of both meanings and an awareness of the transformation paths leading from the F \times to the impression of a G-major triad.

JS: I want to ask you about your readings of specific pieces and passages in this book. Are there any that you would like to change, that you've had a chance to rethink over the years?

CS: There are two that immediately occur to me. The first is Beethoven's Sonata, Op. 14, No. 1, second movement (discussed in Chapter 2). In my discussion of the structural cadence just before the codetta, I pointed to the fact that the goal tonic chord appears in measure 51 at the beginning of a measure-group and therefore sounds metrically, or hypermetrically, strong, in contrast to previous examples, whose closing tonics fell in weak metrical positions. All of this I still believe. I went on, however, to ask whether one might understand measure 51 as an originally weak measure reinterpreted as strong. My answer was no, because it follows measure 50, which is itself a weak measure and which completes a group of measures. I now think this answer is incorrect. If one understands measures 49 and 50 as the expansion of one bar of dominant harmony—and the cognate cadential dominant measure 15 does occupy only one measure—then measure 51 would indeed count as a weak measure at the end of one phrase reinterpreted as a strong measure at the beginning of the next phrase. Such reinterpretations are frequent at codas and codettas, and are a way of securing a strong metrical position for a final tonic. There is an interesting relationship between levels in such cases. If we assume, as I do, that the background I–V–I implies a tonal rhythm of strong–weak–strong, then a weak final tonic at the end of a phrase—a very frequent state of affairs—contradicts that tonal rhythm. The reinterpretation of the final tonic

as a first hyperbeat restores the background rhythm—an example of a foreground closer to the background than the middleground is.

In my discussion of the Schubert song “Dass sie hier gewesen” (in Chapter 8), I don’t want to change anything, but there’s something I’d like to add. I was concentrating too exclusively on motive, which was my central topic in that essay, and I failed to observe that the ambiguous opening chord, which eventually becomes understood as a diminished seventh on C# applied to D as II of C major, is itself an outgrowth of an unspoken C-major chord. In fact, when the opening returns, the diminished seventh chord follows a C-major chord, so that there’s yet another musical response to the idea that the perfume in the air is a sign that the girl had been there. The diminished seventh is, you might say, the perfume of the C-major chord, which is not present. The diminished seventh is a sign of the C-major harmony. That, I think, strengthens my analysis of the passage and is definitely something that should be mentioned.

PART I

RHYTHM AND LINEAR
ANALYSIS



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A Preliminary Study



Of all the criticisms occasioned by the work of Schenker and his school, one has been especially persistent. It is that Schenkerian analysis, whatever insight it may give in many respects, fails to do justice to rhythm, that crucial element without which there could be no music. One might tend to brush aside such an objection if it were expressed only by those unconvinced by Schenker's approach. However, musicians who subscribe to many of Schenker's views have also voiced this criticism.¹

To be sure, mere repetition does not make a statement true. How often have we heard that Beethoven was weak at counterpoint or that the use of extreme registers in his late works was due to his deafness? But whether wholly, partly, or not at all true, any criticism of such staying power deserves our careful attention. By considering its implications, those of us working with the approach can consolidate what we already know and begin to explore areas that are still largely uncharted. In this essay I shall try to explain how this criticism of Schenker arose and to determine the extent to which it is valid. I shall then discuss attempts in recent years to establish a theory of rhythm. And finally I shall outline some of my own ideas about the analysis of rhythm in tonal music.²

Schenker's Treatment of Rhythm

What elements in Schenker's work have led to the view that he slighted rhythm?³ I believe that there are several:

1. Schenker often excluded rhythmic notation from his graphic analyses, particularly those remote from the foreground of the composition.

2. This exclusion results from his conviction that the Fundamental Structure (*Ursatz*) is arrhythmic⁴ and that each level of prolongation brings with it an increasing rhythmic activity.
3. Thus, in Schenker's view, tonal relationships generally take priority over rhythmic ones as determinants of musical structure.
4. In his analyses, Schenker would often assign a high structural level to a tone, a chord, or a tonal complex that the composer had not emphasized by stress or duration. On the other hand, elements that were so emphasized might be consigned to a lower level of structure. In as early a work as *Harmony* (1906) Schenker stated that the harmonic or contrapuntal function of a chord does not depend upon its duration.⁵ This idea, clarified by the concept of structural level, extended to melodic analysis, and expanded to include whole sections of a composition, is implicit in many of his later (graphic) analyses.
5. And finally, Schenker's most devoted adherent must agree that he elaborated no systematic approach to rhythm comparable to what he achieved in the realm of voice leading and tonal organization.

Rhythmic Notation and Graphs

The first of these points—the absence of rhythmic notation from background-level graphs—is certainly the least important. The graph, after all, is a representation and as such is dependent upon the conception leading to it. It should be noted, however, that Schenker often took great pains to include durational values and important groupings (both of tones and of measures) in his foreground graphs, and that these include a wealth of fascinating rhythmic detail. Furthermore, his middleground graphs, even those that contain no rhythmic notation, can yield much valuable insight into the larger rhythms of a composition.

Priority of Tonal Relationships

The second and third points—the arrhythmic nature of the *Ursatz* and the priority of tonal over rhythmic relationships—represent a specific and a general expression of the same thought. For the present I would like to concentrate upon the third point, reserving a discussion of the Fundamental Structure for later treatment.

In considering Schenker's assumption that tonal events take priority over rhythm, we might well begin by determining whether we can even investigate the two aspects of music apart from each other. According to Charles Rosen, such a separation is not valid. One of his complaints about Schenker is that "his neglect of rhythm, too, has only accentuated the nonsensical separation in theory of the elements of music, as if a tonal melody could exist without a rhythmic contour."⁶

Of course no melody could exist without a rhythmic contour (has anyone ever suggested that it could?). But does it then follow that any separation of the elements of music must be "nonsensical"? Only, I think, if the separation plays no role in our perception of music; in music theory the nonsensical is the unhearable. In this connection let us study a few very simple examples from the literature, concentrating upon melody.

Example 1.1 consists of two "melodies" from *The Musical Offering*; the upper is the subject given Bach by Frederick the Great, the lower Bach's variation in the fourth movement of the

EXAMPLE 1.1: J. S. Bach, *The Musical Offering*

EXAMPLE 1.2: Verdi, *Don Carlo*, Act III

a) 1st phrase

b)

a) 2d phrase

b)

The above statement holds true for another aspect of variation technique in tonal composition. Schenker's analyses often point out the disguised repetition of figures or motives; the individual physiognomy of a piece often depends in part upon such disguised repetition. Sometimes the figure will recur at the same structural level; sometimes a foreground motive will be expanded to cover a considerable stretch of middleground. Both possibilities are important to our discussion, for in both the rhythmic alteration of a tonal figure is frequently far more drastic than in Examples 1.1 and 1.2. I have chosen Examples 1.3 and 1.4, both drawn from piano sonatas of Mozart, to illustrate the two possibilities.

Example 1.3 comes from the first movement of the Sonata in G Major, K.283. The development section does not begin by directly quoting a theme or motive; instead Mozart pre-

EXAMPLE 1.3: Mozart, Sonata, K.283

a) Allegro

b)

c)

d)

sents a seemingly new melody of an improvisatory character (Example 1.3a). But this “new” melody is in fact a remembrance of, a musing upon, something heard earlier. It corresponds almost note for note with the opening measures of the second theme (Example 1.3b). Differences in register, ornamentation, and, above all, rhythm disguise the underlying relationship. And indeed it is because the passage is at once the same and not the same as the earlier one that it has such an intriguing charm.

Our next example consists of the D-major episode from the Andante of the Sonata, K.545 (measures 17–24). As Example 1.4a shows, the melodic line moves stepwise up from d^2 to $f\sharp^2$ and then descends, also by step, back to d^2 . The ascending phase of the curve is segmented by descending groups of two notes (reaching-over), thus: $d^2-c\sharp^1$ (measures 17–18), e^2-d^2 (measures 19–20), $f\sharp^2$ (measure 21). Example 1.4b reveals that the melodic outline of the entire eight-measure phrase is contained in the figuration of measure 17; the episode grows out of its first measure like a plant from a seed.

The Schenkerian literature contains many examples similar to the two I have cited. (For a particularly subtle and fascinating one, see, in Schenker’s analysis of the *Eroica*, his discussion of the relationship between the opening theme of the first movement and the E-minor episode of the development.)⁸ This aspect of analysis is especially liable to abuse; it is only too easy to fabricate “thematic relationships” and to impose them upon the music. But to minimize its significance, as Tovey tends to do,⁹ is just as wrong. If the analyst has the necessary mixture of common sense and imagination, and studies thematic design in its connection with linear–harmonic structure, such analysis provides an indispensable view of the individual features of a composition. To perceive such relationships we must separate, as in Examples 1.1 and 1.2, tonal events from their rhythmic contour. Unless we are prepared to do so, we must, I believe, reject Schenker’s work altogether.

And not just Schenker’s, but virtually any theory of tonal music. To speak of a “leading tone” or a “tonic chord,” to point to a V–I progression or to parallel fifths—these imply the possibility of separating some tonal configurations from rhythm. To do so is an indispens-

EXAMPLE 1.4: Mozart, Sonata, K.545, Andante

Example 1.4 consists of two musical staves, labeled 'a)' and 'b)', both in D major (one sharp). Staff 'a)' shows measures 17 through 24. Measure 17 is circled and labeled '17'. Measure 21 is circled and labeled '21'. A large bracket under measures 17–20 is labeled 'I'. A bracket under measures 21–24 is labeled 'II⁶ V I'. Staff 'b)' shows the same measures, but with a different melodic line, illustrating the relationship between the two themes.

able procedure; it grows out of immediate musical perception and not out of some abstruse theory; there are very good reasons why we all do it.

What about the opposite procedure? Can one isolate rhythm and consider it apart from pitch? I believe that one can, but within narrower limits, for one crucial aspect of rhythm—grouping—depends in part upon tonal relationships. Without taking these relationships into account, we are often unable to arrive at even a primitive understanding of rhythm.

Let us examine the opening measures of a keyboard sonata by Domenico Scarlatti (Example 1.5a). How are we to understand the rhythm of this passage? Surely not as twenty-four eighth notes followed by a half note. Each of the first three measures shows a different rhythm, even though the note values are the same. In measure 1 (up to the downbeat of measure 2) the melody moves by step through a rising fifth at quarter-note pace. From the beginning of measure 2 to the end of the phrase, the melody descends to its starting point; the unit of pace is now the half note (Example 1.5b). In measure 1 the eighth notes occur in groups of two, thereafter, in groups of four (Example 1.5c). The falling fifth f^2-bb^1 , unlike the rising one, is subdivided into two thirds, f^2-d^2 and d^2-bb^1 . A change in design emphasizes this division; the melody becomes explicitly polyphonic (Example 1.5d). The melodic polyphony is thrown into relief by the most striking rhythmic development of the phrase, the syncopation in measure 3 caused by the placement off the beats of the main tones d^2 and c^1 . One could say more about the rhythm of his phrase, but the foregoing discussion should suffice to show the reader how much our perception of rhythm depends upon tonal organization.

EXAMPLE 1.5: D. Scarlatti, Sonata, L.500/K.545

a) *Prestissimo*

b)

c)

d)

syncopation