

Schenkerian Analysis and Occam's Razor

L. Poundie Burstein

In his book *Contemplating Music*, Joseph Kerman famously criticized Schenkerian analysis as a positivistic enterprise (1985: 73–74). Schenkerian scholars largely have seemed hesitant to refute this accusation, perhaps betraying a reluctance to deny the notion that Schenkerian analysis has objective and experiential grounding. Some have even argued that Schenkerian analysis should rightly have an empirical basis.¹

Indeed, it has often been suggested that Schenkerian analysis seeks to describe certain concrete elements found in compositions, demonstrating things such as the “coherence or the working-out of long-range implications [...] in the masterpieces of the tonal repertory” (Schulenberg 1985: 304–5) or “the unity of [a] work and the necessity of its constituent moments” (Treitler 1989: 32), that it uncovers “connections among tones that are not readily apparent” (Cadwallader and Gagné 1998: 4), as well as the degree to which a composition may be regarded as tonal (Brown, Dempster, and Headlam 1989: 157).² Some have further argued that Schenkerian analyses properly should reveal structures that are perceived by listeners, and thereby “should predict how suitably qualified auditors might respond to features characteristic of tonal music” (Brown, Dempster, and Headlam 1989: 157).³ Such attitudes promote the notion that Schenkerian analyses seek to study objective elements that are present in the pieces themselves or in the

perceptions of skilled listeners, and thus which may bear empirical investigation. These attitudes also accord with the rhetoric found in many Schenkerian analyses, which typically refer to things like prolongations or hidden motivic connections as if these items actually reside within the composition itself, waiting to be brought to light by the analyst.⁴

However, it is not so clear how one can confirm that the connections described in a Schenkerian analysis do indeed inhere in the work itself, or how one can test whether the more subtle features cited by Schenkerian analyses are perceived by the average educated listener. Adding to the problems in this regard is the murky ontological status of what is examined by Schenkerian analysis. If the compositions studied were performed by digital computers in a strictly prescribed manner and for a clearly defined audience, then one might better be able to produce analytic predictions of sorts. The notated compositions examined by the typical Schenkerian analysis, however, admit a variety of possible valid realizations in performances that are intended for a variety of types of audiences, and this in turn creates severe difficulties for those who attempt to make empirically verifiable statements about subtle features that may exist in a composition or that may be heard by skilled listeners.

There is another way in which one may view the goals of Schenkerian analysis, however, one that I

¹ See, for instance, Brown 2005; and Brown, Dempster, and Headlam 1989; see also recent discussion in Debellis 2010.

² Published comments suggesting that Schenkerian analyses seek to describe features that inhere in composition are by no means uncommon; see for instance, the statement in Debellis 2010: 114 that “a central tenet of [Schenkerian] theory is that a piece *has* a structure of a certain kind” (emphasis added). More often, however, authors tend to state the aims of Schenkerian analysis in a more elliptical fashion. For instance, it is common to find claims that the Schenkerian method is a theory of tonal unity and coherence, without clear specification whether the coherence and unity involved is to be regarded as a feature of the music itself or simply a proposed possible way in which one may experience the music; see, for instance, Salzer 1962: xv; see also discussion of “descriptive” and “suggestive” theories in Temperley 1999 and discussion below.

³ See also Walton 1993: 39, which states that analyses are “...specifications of what we hear. The possibility is open that even the Schenkerian deep structure of a piece, or the fact that the foreground and middleground are elaborations of the deep structure, is in fact an unacknowledged part of the content of musical experiences”; see also critique in Keiler 1978.

⁴ As Steven Rings notes, Schenkerian analyses tend to be “of the ‘theory of the piece,’ or immanent, variety [...]. Such an immanent perspective is evident in familiar locutions in Schenkerian discourse, such as ‘The work is a $\frac{3}{4}$ -line’” (Rings 2011: 36).

feel more accurately reflects its finest applications. According to this alternate view, Schenkerian analysis is essentially a hermeneutic process, one that seeks to propose persuasive and effective ways of how a composition *may* be heard. As such, the Schenkerian method functions as what David Temperley refers to as a “suggestive” theory rather than a “descriptive” theory; that is, it suggests what the analyst believes is a plausible and rewarding manner of perceiving a given composition (Temperley 1999).⁵ For those who can “hear” the work in a manner proposed by a Schenkerian reading (that is, for those who can perceive a direct analogy between the analytic model and the piece at hand) and who find this proposed hearing to be a gratifying one, the analysis will prove successful.

Consider Schenker’s reading of the theme of the finale to Beethoven’s Sonata for Piano in D Minor, Op. 31, No. 2 (Example 1).⁶ In citing an analysis by Schenker himself, incidentally, I do not mean to suggest that Schenkerian analysis must conform to Schenker’s own analytic readings.⁷ What is called “Schenkerian analysis” represents a general approach that grew out of Schenker’s methods and concepts, and that since his time has developed and evolved through a series of clarifications, misreadings, modifications, and extensions. The reason I cite this particular analysis by Schenker is because I feel that it is an especially fine example of Schenkerian interpretation, and that whether one agrees with the interpretation put forth here, it exhibits elements that are worthy of emulation.

As shown in Example 1b, Schenker reads this passage as embraced by an *Ursatz* replica in which a *Zug* from F to D in the upper voice is supported by the *Stufenkreise* I–IV–V–I in D minor. Note that Schenker interprets the dominant-to-tonic succession in bars 11–12 as couched within a larger motion from IV to V. Also note that the Roman numeral V is placed under the bass-note D in the hypermetrically weak bar 12, not under the bass-note A in bar 13.

Does this analysis by Schenker reflect how most skilled musicians hear this excerpt? My own experience suggests not. I have discussed this passage in various undergraduate classes, graduate classes, doctoral seminars, and workshops with students, professors, scholars, and performers from around the world, and through this informal empirical survey I have found that almost nobody comes up with a reading similar to what Schenker has proposed. This suggests that Schenker’s reading does *not* predict how the typical qualified auditor perceives this excerpt – unless one relies on a tautology by arguing that anybody who reads it differently than Schenker is therefore to be regarded as unqualified (a stance admittedly that Schenker himself probably would have taken).

I have found that the reading most people adopt (at least before seeing Schenker’s reading) is more like what is shown in Example 2. With this alternate reading, the tonic harmony is prolonged from bars 1–12. Accordingly, the IV chord of bar 9 does not connect to the V of bar 13. Since this alternate analysis avoids having a tonic couched within a larger progression from IV to V, it thereby arguably presents a simpler, more direct reading than was offered by Schenker. As such, if one’s goal in analysis is to demonstrate the tonal coherence and unity of a passage, or how this passage might be organically generated, then by applying Occam’s razor this alternate analysis would have to be regarded as more successful than the one put forth by Schenker. After all, it explains the passage’s tonal coherence and unity in a plausible manner that is at least as consistent as in Schenker’s reading, but it does so in a simpler and more direct fashion. And if the goal of the analysis is to demonstrate how qualified listeners perceive the work, then the reasons mentioned above likewise would support the reading presented in Example 2 as the better one.

To be sure, there are various melodic, formal, dynamic, and textural nuances that are concretely found in the score itself that could be cited

⁵ This roughly corresponds to what Debellis (2002: 119) describes as a “view of musical analysis [that] finds its value not in explanation but in its cultivation of an enriched mode of hearing on the listener’s part, where the listener hears the music in a new way, or becomes aware of new relationships to hear in it.”

⁶ Schenker’s analysis is from Schenker 1979, Figure 104.1. I discuss this analysis at length in Burstein 2009.

⁷ In this sense, the term “Schenkerian analysis” is an unfortunate one, since it wrongly might suggest that such analyses necessarily reflect Schenker’s own views. Schenker himself likely would have frowned upon this term: he tended to view his theory not as one possible method for understanding music, but rather as the only appropriate method.

Example 1a. Beethoven, Sonata in D Minor, Op. 31, No. 2, III, mm. 1–15.

Allegretto

bar 9

bar 12

p *cresc.* *f* *dimin.*

Example 1b. Beethoven, Sonata in D Minor, Op. 31, No. 2, III, mm. 1–16. Analysis from Schenker 1979, Fig. 104.1.

m. 1 5 8 9 12 13 14 15/16

(accent)

d minor: I (10 - 10 - 10 - 10 - 10) V 4 - 5 I

NB: V6-I within IV-V motion!

Example 2. Proposed alternate analysis of the passage from Example 1b.

bar 1 4 8 9 12 15

I I V I IV bII V⁶ I

in support of Schenker's interpretation.⁸ For instance, the IV chord of bar 9 that is highlighted in his analysis is underlined by its appearance at the start of both a hypermetric group and a sentential continuation segment. The sudden shift in register and figuration helps further emphasize this subdominant chord, as does the crescendo indication at this point and the striking introduction of the "finger pedaling" that starts in bar 9. The dominant harmony of bar 13, which Schenker reads as connected to the subdominant of bar 9, likewise is emphasized through various means, including its appearance at the start of a hypermetric group and the unusual dynamic indications, which – in direct contrast to normal practice – call for a crescendo as the cadential six-four of bar 13 resolves into the V of bar 14. On the other hand, the tonic harmony of bar 12, which Schenker underplays in his reading, arrives toward the tail end of a diminuendo.

But are these details persuasive enough to argue against the more standard reading, as depicted in Example 2, in which a tonic is understood as a goal of a IV–V⁶–I progression in bars 9–12? After all, concrete features of the score could be cited in support this alternate reading as well. For instance, one could argue that the tonic of bar 12 is reinforced by its appearance at the *end* of a hypermetric group and a formal-melodic-textural unit, and that the diminuendo into the tonic of bar 12 underlines the large sense of resolution at this point.

The analyses in Examples 1 and 2 both conform to the standard Schenkerian model. That is, they both read the passage according to a model in which the melody moves in decorated line down toward the tonic, as the supporting harmonies move from tonic to dominant and back. But this in itself is rather trivial, since the same could be said for most any tonal passage. That a passage can be described in relation to such a model does not demonstrate that it is tonally unified: after all, it is only after one has already decided that a passage is unified tonally that this model is invoked to begin with.

The different readings of Examples 1b and 2 do suggest slightly different realizations in performance, however. Schenker's interpretation

of Example 1b encourages the performer to emphasize a connection between bars 9 and 13, perhaps by highlighting Beethoven's unusual dynamic indications and bringing out the striking finger pedaling in these measures, as well as by rhythmically moving past the V⁶–I motion of bars 11–12. The alternate reading of Example 2, on the other hand, might encourage a subtle underlining of the return to tonic harmony in bar 12 by slight adjustments of the rhythm and tone color.

The nuances of performance described in the previous paragraph certainly may each be found in reasonable renditions of this excerpt. This calls into question whether it is possible to arrive at a definitive interpretation of the passage as printed on the page. If the score itself allows for more than one viable performance interpretation, would this not suggest that more than one analytic interpretation might be possible as well?

In the end, which of these analyses one prefers directly relates to how one feels the theme should be performed. It frequently is claimed that a good analytic interpretation may dictate how a passage should be played. Not coincidentally, this claim often is made by music analysis instructors. But in many cases, it could be contended just as readily that a good performance interpretation should dictate how a passage should be analyzed. That is, instead of saying, "I analyze the piece like this, so that's how it should be played," it might be more accurate to state, "I would like it if the piece were performed like this, so that's how I will analyze it."

Granted, Schenker himself would not have regarded his analysis as merely one of several possible interpretations. In the manner of an old-school piano teacher (which, after all, he was) Schenker generally seemed to regard his interpretations of how to perform and analyze a composition as the *only* correct ones. Most musicians today take a more flexible viewpoint and are more tolerant in this regard.

Toleration of alternate interpretations does not mean that one must regard all well-wrought performances or analyses as equally good, however. Specific analyses – like specific performances – might strike us either as contrived or convincing, or as routine or inspiring. One always reserves the right to argue passionately in defense

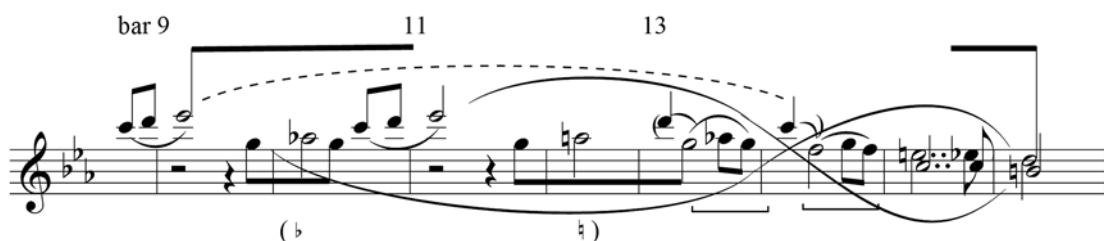
⁸ Naturally, that analytic interpretations are shaped by empirically observable elements does not indicate that the organic connections proposed by the analysis are empirically observable.

of one analytic interpretation or another, much like one can argue in defense of one performance interpretation or the other. As with performance interpretations, various concrete elements of the score may be cited in support of one's preferred analytic reading, as may various logical, stylistic, or historical features. On the other hand, an analytic reading that is contradicted by concrete features of the score or that is not logically wrought would unlikely convince, any more than would a performance filled with wrong notes or in which the choices seem haphazard. But which reading one prefers ultimately comes down to personal opinion. I myself find Schenker's interpretation in Example 1b to be most satisfactory – not because it demonstrates features that are objectively or intersubjectively present in the passage, but rather because I believe that it encourages a plausible yet stimulating and exciting way of perceiving and performing this passage.

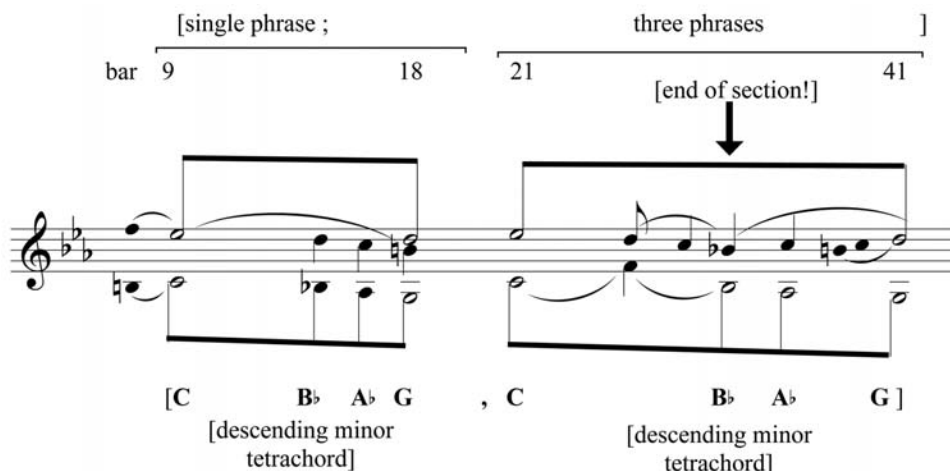
As one more set of examples, let us consider a few details – both large and small – from Schenker's celebrated analysis of Chopin's Etude in C Minor, Op. 10, No. 12 (Schenker 1932: 47–51; see also Schenker 1979, Fig. 12). Here, too, the analysis does not demonstrate the coherence of the composition, or at least it does not do so in an efficient manner. Nor does it demonstrate how most good musicians hear the work. It does, however, propose an arguably compelling manner of interpreting the piece.

In the excerpt of Example 3a, Schenker's use of beams and brackets suggests the presence of a recurring neighbor-tone motive. Recognizing the presence of this proposed motivic connection can bring out certain potential expressive possibilities of the passage. As this reading suggests, in bars 9–10 the A_b of a neighbor figure pulls down to G, in the manner of a sigh. It seems as if this figure starts to repeat in the next bars, with the same rhythm

Example 3a. Chopin, Etude in C Minor, Op. 10, No. 12, mm. 9–18: analysis after Schenker 1969 [1932]: 57.



Example 3b. Chopin, Etude in C Minor, Op. 10, No. 12, mm. 1–41: analysis after Schenker 1969 [1932]: 54.



as before, but now the A_1 is replaced by the more “hopeful” A_2 , on which the melody briefly dwells. This A_2 hints that the melody might now lead upwards. This is not to be, however, for (at least according to Schenker’s reading) the A_2 , too, turns out to form part of a neighbor motive, as though it cannot escape from the pull of the sigh figure – at least not yet. It is only within the consequent phrase (of bars 21–28) that the A_2 is able to break away, so to speak, to lead to a grand ascent.

Awareness of the parallelisms between the obvious neighbor figure of bars 9–10 and the less obvious one of bars 11–13 helps highlight this dramatic twist. Nevertheless, this analysis does not demonstrate that any significant motivic connection is objectively present here; it merely proposes that one may fruitfully understand the passage as containing such a connection. Although there are concrete pitch and rhythmic elements that permit such an interpretation, that there is a connection between these elements is not a concrete fact. The segments that Schenker highlights do share a basic melodic and contrapuntal profile. But almost any two musical excerpts can be shown to have something in common. Showing that two things are in certain ways similar to one another does not necessarily indicate that the similarity is meaningful – although, for the reasons just mentioned, I do find the similarity that Schenker points out here to be evocative.

Indeed, I find Schenker’s reading so convincing that I wonder whether I was aware of it even before becoming acquainted with his analysis. That is, might I have been subliminally aware of the motivic connection highlighted in Example 3a even before first seeing Schenker’s reading? Maybe yes, maybe no. Perhaps one reason I enjoyed this piece so much when I initially heard it was that I subconsciously perceived this motivic connection, even if it was only after seeing Schenker’s analysis that I was able to articulate my reactions. Or perhaps I was completely unaware of this motivic connection, consciously or otherwise, but nevertheless liked the composition for other reasons. But what would it matter? It remains that having now seen Schenker’s analysis, I find the motivic connection that he cites to be a

compelling one, and this would be true whether I or anybody else previously noticed this motive, either consciously or subconsciously. Unless one can provide experimental documentation, it seems fraudulent to argue that one’s own analytic interpretation is something that others are actually hearing subliminally.

This is not to deny that for a simple situation such as this (or the one shown below in Example 4) someone could construct a cognitive experiment to test whether most people would hear such a pattern. But this is not what Schenker has done, nor is it what most Schenkerian analysts do. Furthermore, considering the multitudinous variables involved, I question whether such cognitive experiments would show that many of Schenker’s more complex readings reflect responses of average listeners, even among those who are skilled musicians.

This is especially true so when the analyses deal with deeper-level features. Consider the reading shown in Example 3b. According to this analysis, the bass twice outlines a descending tetrachord leading from C to G, first in bars 9–18, and then in bars 21–41. This reading in essence claims that the bass line of these passages can be regarded as sounding similar to what a simple descending minor tetrachord sounds like. Concerning bars 9–18, this metaphor is straightforward: that is, I assume that most people would agree that the bass line of this phrase sounds like a descending minor tetrachord. It is not so easy to hear bars 21–41 in relation to such a model, however.⁹ The passage of bars 1–41 extends for about a quarter of the entire composition, cutting across two sections and three phrases. I doubt whether many could rightly claim that – before becoming acquainted with Schenker’s analysis – they were able to perceive (either consciously or subconsciously) that the bass line of these measures sounds analogous to a descending tetrachord.

Nevertheless, if after seeing Schenker’s analysis someone can perceive an analogy between Chopin’s composition and Schenker’s model, and if the perception of this analogy is found to be an enriching one, then for that person Schenker’s analysis can be regarded as successful. One perhaps might try to persuade those who are

⁹ Indeed, this aspect of Schenker’s analysis of this etude has been the target of criticism by various scholars; see, for instance, Smith 1996: 191–297 (especially 214–5); Phipps 1983: 543–69; and Humal 2008: 105–6.

unconvinced that hearing such a connection is worthwhile, or try to explain concrete features of the music that might allow someone to hear this connection. Yet when confronting people who insist that they cannot hear this proposed expanded motive, it will do no good to argue that they perceive it subliminally, but are simply in denial. Nor is it reasonable to claim that the descending tetrachord is *actually* a feature of the music, whether anybody can perceive it or not.

This is particularly important to remember when considering the value of long-range analytic voice-leading interpretations. In a well-known experiment, Nicholas Cook sought to examine if the presence or lack of long-range musical closure affected listeners' evaluations of selected pieces.¹⁰ The results of this study suggest that most listeners do not perceive tonal closure in selections that last longer than about a minute.¹¹

Some have claimed that the results of Cook's experiment have a bearing on Schenkerian analysis.¹² It should be noted, however, that the popular association of large structures with Schenkerian analysis is an exaggeration. Schenkerian analysis tends to put no more emphasis on large structures than do many other popular methods of tonal analysis. Many other analytic systems evoke structures that are as large as or larger than ones discussed by the typical Schenkerian analysis. For instance, many non-Schenkerian analytic approaches propose huge tonal plans that embrace multi-movement compositions or even entire operas. In contrast, a typical Schenkerian analysis discusses a single movement or a passage within a single movement, and most of Schenker's own published analyses focus on works or passages that last not much more than a minute at most. What distinguishes Schenkerian analysis from many other approaches is not so much its examination of large tonal spans, but rather the way in which its models allow for a convincing representation of the interaction

between varying levels of tonal motion. He was continually engaged with a concern for a balance of the entirety of a work with its details, and above all the interrelationship between these two.

Sensitivity to the surface of the music is vital to appreciating the deep-level features that may be cited in a Schenkerian analysis. People who are attuned to the various elements of the musical surface – including thematic repetitions, conventional rhetorical devices, and textural features – in turn can train themselves to perceive large tonal frameworks such as may be proposed by a good Schenkerian reading. For instance, in eighteenth-century orchestral music especially, orchestrational clues play a crucial role for the audibility of larger tonal frameworks. In particular, owing to their limited pitch possibilities, the tympani and brass instruments in music of this period tend to play primarily during passages within the main key areas, thereby serving as types of tonal signposts that articulate arrivals at crucial tonal junctures. Tactile or visual features also frequently help bolster the perception of long-range tonal motions. It should be remembered that many solo and chamber works of the repertoire were intended not primarily for concert performance, but rather for a setting in which the main "audiences" were the performers themselves. Thus, for instance, for a Mozart piano sonata the ideal listener is not someone who hears a recording of the piece, as was the case in Cook's experiment, but rather someone who actually plays the composition at the keyboard. For those who play the piece, the look of the notes on the page and the feel of keyboard under the fingers form a vital part of the aesthetic experience, and these factors surely can greatly aid one's ability to perceive the deep-level tonal schemes that may be proposed in a good Schenkerian analysis.

In any case, the utility of Schenkerian analysis is not threatened by the notion that the average qualified listener might not be aware of the

¹⁰ See Cook 1987; see also Cook 1994.

¹¹ As others have noted, there are certain problems with the layout of Cook's experiment; see, for instance, discussion in Gjerdingen 1999: 164–6. Still, no doubt most would acknowledge the veracity of the experiment's basic conclusions: namely, that for most people (including trained musicians) the enjoyment of a recording of a long piece heard a single time would not be deleteriously affected if the composition began and ended in different keys.

¹² See, for instance, discussion in Broman 1997. Cook himself does not adopt such a stance, however. As he notes in Cook 1990: 4–5, "a Schenkerian analysis is not a scientific explanation, but a metaphorical one; it is not an account of how people actually hear pieces of music, but a way of imagining them [...]. [T]he structural wholeness of musical works should be seen as a metaphorical construction, rather than as directly corresponding to anything that is real in a perceptual sense." The present essay echoes Cook in this regard; see also comments in Cook 1989.

large-scale tonal organization. In evaluating the effectiveness of an analysis, what is important is not whether such structures *are* perceived by the typical listener, but whether they *can* be perceived, as well as whether such a perception can enhance one's experience of the composition at hand. To propose a form of Schenkerian analysis that requires that perception of its conclusions be able to be experimentally verified as perceptible by the typical qualified listener would disqualify many the most inspirational examples of such analyses, such as are discussed above.

The Schenkerian model is by no means the only one possible. It is an extraordinarily effective one – and it is largely (if not entirely) a well-formed and logical model – but it is a model nonetheless. Despite the rhetoric typical of Schenkerian analyses, I would argue that the features they describe – such as prolongations, the *Urfinie*, and motivic connections – do not exist in the music itself. These are metaphors, analytic fabrications that serve as a part of a model used to help express a way that one may perceive the music. If it is to make valid sense, then when a Schenkerian analysis states something like “in this composition the *Kopfton* is scale degree $\hat{3}$,” what is to be understood is that analysis claims the belief that the given composition is most effectively represented by a voice-leading model in which

the *Kopfton* is scale degree $\hat{3}$: the *Kopfton* is a part of the model, not of the actual composition.¹³

In this regard, Schenkerian analysis is similar to most other types of analysis, which likewise rely on models. Things such as cadences or chord progressions are not found directly in a work of music, but are found merely within the analytic model. For instance, regarding the excerpt of Example 4: consider the claim that a dominant harmony in bar 7 resolves to tonic in the following measure (as depicted in the model placed under the last two bars of the passage). This analysis is so straightforward that some might regard it as presenting an empirical fact. Yet even this simple analysis relies on interpretation and analytic models. In actuality, there is no dominant chord or tonic chord in bars 7 and 8. These harmonies are simply implied: that is, harmonies such as shown in the staff below the excerpt form an analog that approximates what happens in the actual music. The claim that a *V* resolves to *I* in Example 4 is itself but an analytic interpretation. What we actually have is simply notes of a *V* chord followed by those of a *I*: the notion that a resolution occurs here is something that is imposed by the analysis.

To regard an analysis as an interpretation or representation is not to denigrate it. Certainly the excerpt cited in Example 4 is best interpreted as concluding in the manner of a dominant chord

Example 4. Haydn, Piano Trio in B \flat Major, Hob. XV/20, II, mm. 1–8 (a) and the proposed harmonic model for m. 7 (second beat) through m. 8 (b).

¹³ See also comments in Note 15 below.

resolving to a tonic chord. One might feel strongly about the suitability of such an analysis, much like one might feel strongly about the notion that Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau is a good singer, or that Wolfgang Mozart is a good composer. In such matters, too, we might try to persuade others to share our opinions by appealing to concrete audible features or logically wrought standards. But no matter how deeply we would like others to share our views in such instances, ultimately they remain subjective stances.

For a simple example such as seen in Example 4, one certainly could set up an experiment to test whether an average listener would be able to perceive the analogy to the proposed model. But in the unlikely event that most of the test subjects do not hear this passage as concluding with a V-I resolution, would that cause you to change your view of the excerpt? Or would it cause you to question whether the test subjects were indeed qualified listeners? And how would one test the perceptibility of the more subtle assertions found in Schenkerian analyses? If an empirical experiment showed overwhelmingly that most qualified auditors interpreted a passage in a routine manner, would that necessarily cause you to reject an alternate plausible reading that you found to be more evocative?

David Temperley has observed that Schenkerian analytic discussions frequently do acknowledge a degree of subjectivity (Temperley 1999).¹⁴ As Temperley further points out, however, these discussions routinely also claim to record objective features of the composition and its perception, often switching to and from "suggestive" language and "descriptive" language in quick succession. For instance, in his celebrated essay "Either/Or," Carl Schachter states that when confronted with

a passage for which there are multiple plausible readings, one "must search for clues about which of the two or more possible interpretations is the correct one, or about which of the two or more 'correct' ones is the truest artistically" (Schachter 1999: 122). The first part of this formulation suggests that the analysis strives to accurately reflect what is in the composition, but the second part suggests that it rather seeks to propose an "artistically" satisfactory way of hearing the work. In a manner typical of many Schenkerian essays, Schachter's rhetoric throughout the essay wavers between "descriptive" and "suggestive" rhetoric, so that it is not entirely clear to the reader whether he regards his readings primarily as empirical observations or as hermeneutic interpretations.¹⁵

In his essay cited in the previous paragraph, Temperley himself refuses to declare whether Schenkerian theory should rightly be regarded as descriptive or suggestive. I am less reluctant than Temperley in this regard in my advocating that Schenkerian analysis is best practiced as a part of suggestive theory, and I feel that abandoning pretensions towards empirical aims will help Schenkerian analysts to better focus on the interpretive nature of the analytic process. That is, I argue Schenkerian analytic discussion will benefit by more openly acknowledging that they do not *uncover* hidden musical connections, but rather that they propose them.

There is an understandable tendency for music analysts and performers to try to appeal to a higher authority in support of their readings. Some appeal to a Deity, others – such as Schenker – to Nature. Nowadays, it is more common for the higher authority to be Science. Appealing to Science might bolster the claim that one's analysis is not simply a matter of personal opinion, but

¹⁴ Though Temperley's essay was published over ten years ago, such mixture of suggestive and descriptive rhetoric in Schenkerian discussions continue to be found. For instance, in his recently published handbook on Schenkerian analysis, Tom Pankhurst states that Schenkerian analysis "offers profound insights into how tonal music works" and yet then quickly notes that it "is ultimately an interpretive act – it invites its readers to hear a piece of music in a particular way" (Pankhurst 2008: 4–5).

¹⁵ Here and elsewhere, this mixture of descriptive and suggestive terminology might result from demands of effective prose writing. After all, to say things like "this excerpt contains a wonderful motivic parallelism" or "the reprise, then, begins with an apparent tonic" (Schachter 1999: 126 and 127) is far more elegant than to say "this excerpt is best understood as containing a wonderful motivic parallelism" of "the reprise, then, is most effectively interpreted as beginning with an apparent tonic." Nevertheless, the more concise statements might suggest – even if unintentionally – that analysis attempts to describe concrete connections within the music itself; in this regard, see discussion in Rings 2011: 36, Note 52. As argued above, if they are to be regarded as valid, I feel such descriptive statements in Schenkerian analyses are rightly to be understood as abbreviated forms of suggestive statements.

rather something that has cognitive backing. As far as Schenkerian analyses are concerned, however, one may well wonder to what degree finding such empirical, scientific support is entirely possible or even desirable. I would rather seem that the best one can do is to point out those concrete features in a composition that might support one's interpretative reading, hoping that other qualified listeners will be able to perceive

the connections suggested by the analysis and agree that it is rewarding to hear these proposed connections within the composition. What I find most attractive about Schenkerian analysis is that it offers a powerful model that allows one to effectively relate subjective interpretations of nuances in a tonal composition, and for me this is reason enough to recommend it as a useful analytic tool.

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Schenkeri analüüs ja Ockhami habemenuga¹

L. Pouldie Burstein
(tõlkinud Mart Humal)

Schenkeri analüüsimeetodi parimad näited ei kajasta mitte empiirilist protsessi eesmärgiga avada teoses leiduvaid iseärasusi ega dokumenteerida seda, kuidas kogunud muusikud teoseid tajuvad, vaid kujutavad endast põhiolemuselt hermeneutilist protsessi, kirjeldamaks teose kõige efektiivsemat kuulamisviisi.

Vaadelgem näiteks Heinrich Schenkeri klassikalist Beethoveni sonaadi *d*-moll *op.* 31/2 kolmanda osa peateema (näide 1a) analüüsi (näide 1b = Schenker 1979, näide 104.1). Kogemus näitab, et enamik muusikuid tõlgendab selle lause häältejuhtimist sirgjooneliselt (näide 2): toonika prolongatsioonile taktides 1–12 järgneb kadents I–V. Selline analüüs on kindlasti põhjendatud. Seevastu Schenkeril hõlmab takte 9–13 järgnevus IV–V, allutades endale järgnevuse V_6 –I taktides 11–12. Schenkeri tõlgendus on tavapärasest keerukam ja eeldab sellest erinevat esitusviisi. Seega, kui eesmärgiks on kõige efektiivsemalt kirjeldada teema ühtsust või viisi, kuidas kogunud muusikud seda tajuvad, tuleb Schenkeri tõlgendust pidada ebaõnnestunuks. Samas aga võib see osutada õnnestunuks, kui käsitada seda kui teema võimaliku tõlgendusviisi, mis püüab kirjeldada intrigeerivat, kuid siiski usutatavat võimalust seda kuulda ja esitada.

Sama olukord tekib laiaulatuslike Schenkeri analüüsides puhul. Üldiselt ei pane Schenkeri analüüsimeetod ulatuslikele struktuuridele suuremat rõhku kui paljud teised tuntud tonaalse muusika analüüsimeetodid, millest mõned tegelevad isegi veel ulatuslikumate struktuuridega kui tüüpilistes Schenkeri analüüsides. Kuid Schenkeri analüüsimeetodit eristab teistest eelkõige viis, kuidas ta käsitleb vastastikuseid suhteid tonaalse arengu eri tasandite vahel, kusjuures süvastruktuuride iseärasuste mõistmiseks on hädavajalik pinnatasandi peen tajumine. Nagu ka pisidetaile, ei tule Schenkeri analüüsi pakutavaid ulatuslikke struktuure mõista kui muusikas endas leiduvaid ega muusikute poolt tüüpiliselt tajutavaid, vaid kui selliseid, mis võivad olla muusiku jaoks tajutavad ja tajumisväärsed.

Vaadelgem järgnevalt Schenkeri tõlgendust Chopini etüüdist *c*-moll *op.* 10/12 (näide 3a = Schenker 1932: 47–51). Ilma seda tundmata näib ebatõenäolisena, et kuulajad tajuksid õigesti Schenkeri näidatud süvatasandi motiivi – laiaulatuslikku laskuvat bassikäiku *c–b–as–g*, mis hõlmab takte 21–41 (ja sarnaneb kergemini kuuldava bassikäiguga taktides 9–18, vt. näide 3b). Kuid nagu alati, pole seda laadi analüüsi efektiivsuse hindamisel tähtis mitte see, kas tavakuulajad niisugust struktuuri tajuvad, vaid kas seda on võimalik nii tajuda ja kas selline tajumisviis rikastab teose mõistmist.

Kui kujutleda Schenkeri analüüsi sellisel kujul, mis eeldab, et selle järeldused oleksid eksperimentaalselt verifitseeritavad ja asjatundliku tavakuulaja poolt tajutavad, või nõuda, et analüüsi käigus leitud iseärasused oleksid teosele olemuslikena empiirilisel kontrollitavad, tähendaks see paljude Schenkeri analüüsimeetodi sisukaimate näidete (sealhulgas eelmainitute) diskvalifitseerimist. Kokkuvõttes on parim viis praktiseerida Schenkeri analüüsi „sugereeriva“ (*suggestive*) teooriana, kusjuures loobumine pretendeerimast empiirilisele aitab paremini keskenduda analüütilise protsessi interpreteerivale olemusele.

¹ „Ockhami habemenuga“ on inglise filosoofi, nn. nominalismi esindaja William Ockhami (Occam; u. 1300–1349) nime järgi tuntud printsiip „Pluralitas non est ponenda sine necessitate“ („tuleb vältida tarbetut [mõistete] paljusust“), mille kohaselt lihtsaim vastus on sageli õigeim. (*Toim.*)