

The Pitch-Class Motive in Tonal Analysis: Some Historical and Critical Observations

Patrick McCreless

I. Preliminaries

All of us, as tonal theorists, know some pieces that mark and problematize a particular chromatic note, such that the tonal plot of the piece turns in important respects on what happens to that note, and how its harmonic implications ramify across musical time. In recent years some theorists have come to designate such motives as *pitch-class motives*. To the best of my knowledge, the theorist who first used this locution with respect to tonal music is Steven Laitz (1992), whose dissertation surveys the then current literature on such motives and then homes in specifically on what he calls “the submediant complex,” by which he means the harmonic complex around scale-degrees $\hat{5}$, $\flat\hat{6}/\sharp\hat{5}$, and $\hat{6}$.¹ Within this complex, it is the pitch-class $\flat\hat{6}/\sharp\hat{5}$ (in the major mode), and the harmonic and motivic action about it, that surely constitutes the most common harmonic site for the pitch-class motive in tonal music. Laitz dates its maximal usage in the tonal repertoire from about 1800 to about 1840, though he observes that there are examples from as early as the 1780’s, and that the practice continued, as a kind of *lingua franca*, through the rest of the nineteenth century. He then focuses his analytical study exclusively on Schubert songs, where the pitch-class motive in general, and its placement on $\flat\hat{6}/\sharp\hat{5}$ in particular, is ubiquitous. Despite Laitz’s path-breaking work, the term is still not common currency in the music theory literature: even now, twenty years after the completion of his dissertation, a search of the entire run of *Music Theory Spectrum* turns up only a few instances of its usage, some of which are in the context of post-tonal, rather than tonal, music.

Laitz begins his dissertation with a survey of the usage of the term *motive* by three canonic twentieth-century theorists – Schoenberg, Reti, and Schenker – from which exercise he finds Schoenberg’s and Reti’s work wanting (confusion

and lack of clarity in both, and prescriptive analyses in the extreme in Reti), but Schenker’s useful and worthy of further development. Since Schenker defines his terms more carefully, and since he is able to produce more convincing analyses, Laitz uses his concept of motive to undergird the theory of the pitch-class motive, which he sees a subclass of the Schenkerian motive. His critical point is that, in his view, and in Schenker’s, no single pitch-class can be a motive in and of itself; it must be tied to a deeper structural level as a component of a linear motion – that is, in effect, it must be a passing or neighboring tone (Laitz 1992: vi–vii). This position is eminently clear in his treatment of the chromatic pitch-class (henceforth pc) $\flat\hat{6}/\sharp\hat{5}$ in the major mode. Chromaticization of the sixth scale-degree in major produces, in linear-motivic terms, either a $\hat{5}-\flat\hat{6}-\hat{5}$ neighboring motion, or a $\hat{5}-\sharp\hat{5}-\hat{6}$ passing motion. The equivalence $\flat\hat{6}/\sharp\hat{5}$ opens up a wide harmonic spectrum, and composers have taken advantage of this and other chromatic and/or enharmonic relationships in extraordinarily imaginative ways for the past two centuries.

Following Laitz’s Schenkerian inclinations, we can use three binary distinctions to categorize Schenker’s views on the musical motive across the four decades or so of his music-theoretical work. The first of these is the distinction *surface/depth*. What he describes in *Harmony* (Schenker 1954),² and what had been articulated by many theorists in the preceding century and even earlier, is, of course, the surface motive. Later, as he began to develop his idea of structural levels, he gradually conceptualized a motive of a different sort – a *hidden* motive, and one that, like voice-leading, could play out on different levels. A second binary is *transposed/untransposed* – a distinction applicable to both surface motives and to Schenker’s later hidden motives. Laitz notes that, whereas most analysts of the nineteenth and

¹ I have recently discovered a source that pre-dates Laitz’s use of the term in tonal music: Forte 1990. Forte, of course, uses the term with respect to associative pitch-classes or keys in a whole opera, whereas Laitz employs it with respect to works on a much smaller scale – *Lieder* and instrumental movements. Forte’s article surely appeared too late for Laitz to engage it, especially since it deals with an entirely different repertoire.

² This well-known publication cuts much important material from Schenker’s 1906 *Harmonielehre*, and many have deemed the translation itself to be so flawed as to be unusable. See, for example, Puffett 1996: 15.

early twentieth centuries focused on *transposed* motives, Schenker was one of the first to emphasize *untransposed* motives – especially motives that retain the same pitch classes in a new tonal context, such that untransposed pitches take on a new scale-degree meaning when the tonal center shifts. A familiar diatonic example is, say, the neighboring figure $\hat{5}-\hat{6}-\hat{5}$ in a minor key, which becomes $\hat{3}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}$ when the governing tonic moves from I to III.³ Schenker was, as we know, exceptionally fond of showing such untransposed motives across different parts of a composition, and at more than one structural level. The final binary is the familiar *diatonic/chromatic*. What then, in terms of our three binaries, makes a motive a *pitch-class motive* (henceforth pc-motive)? For Laitz, it is non-transposition, or pitch-specificity, whether in surface or hidden motives, that is the determining factor in classifying a figure as having a pc-motivic function. For him (and in fact for Schenker as well), pc-motives can be either diatonic or chromatic, but he is more interested in the chromatic type, which almost always involves enharmonicism as well, and which is of course absolutely essential to his analytical work on Schubert songs.⁴

It was, of course, abundantly clear to Laitz in 1992, and it is even clearer to us now, that all sorts of writers about tonal music – theorists of various stripes, musicologists, biographers of composers, critics, and so forth – have pointed out, often in stunning detail, instances of what he calls the pc-motive, along with their compositional ramifications in individual works. Indeed, very abundance of analyses that identify such motives and trace them through compositions makes us want to interrogate them – to search for their origins, to evaluate their usefulness, and to note the critical uses to which they have been put.

II. Historical Observations:

Origins

Most musical scholars who study the Western musical canon have a quite robust idea of what the pc-motive is, and of how it functions in actual pieces, even if they do not use the term. As

evidence for this claim, note the following two descriptions of the phenomenon – descriptions that are remarkably similar, even though they were conceived completely independently of one another, in different times and places, with different aims. We begin with the description that Laitz himself offers, introducing the first extensive analytical example in his dissertation, the Minuet from Haydn's String Quartet in C Major, Op. 64, No. 1:

This movement provides a representative example of a motivic process that characterizes numerous compositions in the tonal repertoire: early on in the piece, certain contiguous pitch classes are highlighted, one of which is chromatic – indeed, it is this which marks it for memory. The chromatic pitch, malleable enough to recur in various contexts, occurs throughout the piece in concert with one or both of its flanking diatonic pitches. That this melodic entity comprises a three-note chromatic segment rather than one pitch acting in isolation allows us to specify criteria by which its repetitions may be verified and considered motivic. [...] Such a pitch-class motive may be developed in dramatic ways including the “promotion” of one or all of its members to deeper levels of structure, usually by a step-by-step process. In summary, then, a chromatic pitch-class motive generally: 1) recurs throughout the texture of a composition; 2) is highlighted in some fashion (for example, registrally, dynamically, or as a foreground dissonance; and 3) recurs at more than one level of structure (Laitz 1992: 101–2).

Without comment, let us proceed to a similar description offered by Joseph Straus, in an article on the notion of disability in music, published in 2006. After referring to Edward T. Cone's influential essay (Cone 1982), as foundational for the sort of piece and analytical strategy he describes, he continues as follows:

There are many early nineteenth-century musical works that, like the Schubert *Moment musical* discussed by Cone, follow a dramatic plan in three phases:

³ Schoenberg was also sensitive to untransposed motives of this sort. See, for example, the discussion in Carpenter 1983: 18–24.

⁴ See the extensive discussion in Laitz 1992: 59–74.

1. The music begins with a relatively straightforward assertion of key. Early on, usually within the first sixteen measures, a chromatic note is stated in a rhetorically charged manner that marks it for attention. In the music that follows immediately, the chromatic note is abandoned, and the music proceeds as if it had never occurred.
2. Later, however, that chromatic note becomes the focal point for harmonic and formal disruptions that increase in intensity over the course of the piece.
3. Finally, near the end of the piece, the chromatic note is normalized in some way, subsumed into the diatonic frame. (Straus 2006: 151)

The descriptions are strikingly similar. Both refer to the introduction of the motivic pitch-class and its being highlighted or marked for attention; and both refer to its dramatic development and intensification as the piece proceeds. I suspect that, should Laitz and Straus confer on those aspects of the phenomenon which one of them mentions but the other does not, Laitz would concur that chromatic note is normalized and subsumed into the diatonic frame at the end of the piece (as it obviously would have to be in Schenkerian theory), and Straus would concur that the pc-motive recurs at different structural levels.⁵ Assuming such agreement, the principal difference between the two descriptions is that Laitz insists on the explicitly Schenkerian requirement that motives of this sort incorporate the chromatic pitch within a linear, prolongational event, while Straus does not.

Yet, interestingly, it is clear that Straus, writing in 2006, did not know of Laitz's work from 1992 – else he would surely have cited it; but since the term *pc-motive*, at least as applied to tonal contexts, was essentially unknown in 2006, he could hardly have known that Laitz's work was relevant to his own. That he could independently

produce virtually the same description as Laitz, but almost fifteen years later, bolsters the claim that writers about tonal music have a robust sense of how such things work. When we find similar descriptions across a wide range of analytical, critical, theoretical, and historical writing, and across two or three generations of scholars and critics, we are naturally curious as to when and how the compositional practice itself originated, and also as to when theorists and critics began to write about it. Hence two central questions arise – one concerning the history of music, and one concerning the history of music theory, analysis, and criticism.

Question 1 (The History of Musical Composition Question): When in the history of the Western tonal tradition did composers begin using chromatic pc-motives? Provisional answer: Not at all through the first three-quarters or so of the eighteenth century, and probably not until the 1780's, as suggested by Laitz. His earliest example is the one mentioned above: the Menuet from Haydn's String Quartet in C Major, Op. 64, No. 1, of 1790. A slightly earlier candidate is the first movement of Haydn's String Quartet in F Major, Op. 50, No. 5, from 1788. Here scale degree $\#5/b\hat{6}$, $C\#/D\flat$, is a crucial motivic element throughout. Far more than in Op. 64, No. 1, the pc-motivic note is rhetorically marked, and it is strikingly foregrounded as the central dramatic element throughout the movement.⁶ There are a few more viable candidates composed before 1800 – for example: Mozart's Symphony No. 40 in G Minor [1788] (the motivic $C\flat$ in the second movement in $E\flat$ major); Haydn's Symphony No. 99 in $E\flat$ Major [1793] ($C\flat/B\flat$ in the first movement); Beethoven, Piano Trio in G Major, Op. 1, No. 2 [1795] ($B\sharp/C\sharp$ in the second movement in E major); Beethoven, Piano Sonata in A Major, Op. 2, No. 2 ($A\sharp/B\flat$ in the Rondo); and Beethoven, Piano Sonata in $E\flat$ Major, Op. 7 ($B\flat/C\flat$ in the Rondo).⁷ A careful search would quite probably identify earlier

⁵ A further minor difference is that Straus claims, but Laitz does not, that the initially marked chromatic note disappears for a while, "as if it had never occurred." Surely both Straus and Laitz would agree that such a claim depends entirely on the piece being considered.

⁶ Charles Rosen points out the motivic significance of the $C\sharp$ in the exposition of the first movement of this quartet, but not its working out through the rest of the movement. See Rosen 1971: 131–2.

⁷ The chromatic pc associations in each of these movements have been noted by at least one scholar. For the Mozart symphony, see Babbitt 2003: 192. For the Haydn symphony, see Haimo 1990: 258. For the Beethoven Piano Trio, see Straus 2006: 154. For the two Beethoven sonata examples, see Schenker 1979, § 256, Figure 121.

examples as well. But not too early: composers of the generation of J. S. Bach, Handel, and Vivaldi limited themselves almost exclusively to the so-called closely related keys. Exceptions are rare, and usually occur in genres friendly to harmonic extremes – e.g., fantasias and toccatas. Though there is undoubtedly the occasional exception, it was only in the later eighteenth century that composers began to experiment systematically with enharmonically related pcs as pitch-specific motivic elements across musical time.

It was especially Beethoven, in his middle-period works, beginning with the first movement of the *Eroica* Symphony, who most powerfully discovered the inherent musico-dramatic potential of pc-motive and began to use it extensively (e.g., the String Quartets Op. 59 No. 2, and Opp. 74 and 95; the Fourth, Seventh, and Eighth Symphonies).⁸ Later Viennese composers (Schubert and Brahms in particular) and others, such as Chopin, followed suit, with great originality and distinction. Elsewhere in Europe, another German composer made it absolutely central to his work: Richard Wagner, whose harmonic practice, from the *Ring* on, is founded upon the notion of pc-specific motives functioning, at different levels, across vast spans of musical and dramatic time. (Laitz, of course, whose interest is in Schubert, does not consider the pc-motive with respect to Wagner.)

Question 2 (The History of Music Analysis and Criticism Question): When did music theorists and analysts become aware of chromatic pc-motives? Provisional, though confident, answer: There are four identifiable and ongoing traditions, each initiated by a canonical writer in the first half of the twentieth century – one beginning with Schenker, one beginning with Schoenberg, one beginning with Donald Francis Tovey, and one beginning with Ernst Kurth and Alfred Lorenz. Only the Schenker, Schoenberg, and Tovey traditions, which are associated primarily with the post-1780's repertoire of instrumental music (and, to a much lesser extent, the *Lied*), will concern us here. (Kurth and Lorenz's work is important, and

it is related conceptually to the other traditions; but it deals primarily with Wagnerian opera, and it must remain beyond the scope of the present paper.) Laitz and Straus both offer detailed considerations of the approaches that Schenker and Schoenberg take to the so-called pc-motive – Laitz in preparation for his Schenker-based study, Straus in the context of showing how the interpretive and analytical language of these two theorists, as well as that of Tovey, resonates strikingly with the ways that natural language has evolved to describe various conditions of disability (Laitz 1992: 3–31, 42–58, Chapter 2; Straus 2006: 136–48).⁹ The discussion below will examine and compare the contributions of Schenker, Schoenberg, and Tovey, and a few of their music-analytical and music-critical descendants, before turning to three analytical examples.

We have already followed, to a degree, Laitz's evaluation of Schenker's theories vis-à-vis the pc-motive. Laitz acknowledges from the start that Schenker did not explicitly name the concept. Yet motivic chromaticism is surely among the features described in the following statement from *Free Composition* – undoubtedly one of the most frequently cited passages in all of Schenker's work: "In the art of music, as in life, motion toward the goal encounters obstacles, reverses, disappointments, and involves great distances, detours, expansions, interpolations, and, in short, retardations of all kinds" (Schenker 1979: 5). And in one instance in *Free Composition*, cited and emphasized by Laitz, he at least *seems* to be describing a pc-motive, although he does so strictly in the context of his own voice-leading graph. The example is the first movement of Beethoven's Sonata for Piano in E_b Major, Op. 81a, and Schenker, significantly, places it in his discussion of (motivic) repetition – especially hidden repetition – within his chapter on the foreground. Offering a graph of the first 62 measures of the movement, he singles out virtually every G₄ and G₃ by putting the natural or flat sign above the relevant notes, and he comments as follows: "Here g₃² and g₄² are engaged in a struggle with one another – only two

⁸ For more examples in Beethoven, see Kamien 2000: 79–80.

⁹ Laitz and Straus both consider Schenker and Schoenberg, plus one more theorist: Rudolph Reti for Laitz, Tovey for Straus. Of the two, I include Tovey, but not Reti. Tovey, as we will see, was a central influence upon a number of important musical writers in the decades following his death in 1940. Reti, on the other hand, has had far less lasting influence, and his theories and analyses have not stood the test of time. The works of Kurth and Lorenz relevant to the pc-motive are Kurth 1920 and Lorenz 1924–33, respectively.

single tones, certainly not a motive in the usual sense. And yet the synthesis of the entire first movement circles around this conflict.” (Schenker 1979, § 254 and Figure 119, 7) More important, however, in the section on motivic parallelism in *Free Composition*, is his discussion of *enharmonic* motivic parallelism, of which he gives four telling examples: those already cited from Beethoven’s Sonatas Op. 2, No. 2, and Op. 7, plus an example from Brahms’s First Symphony, and one from Chopin’s G-Minor Ballade (Schenker 1979, § 256 and Figure 121).¹⁰ All four of these examples involve chromatic/enharmonic cross-referential motivic usage, and they make it clear that he did recognize and theorize what we now designate as the (chromatic/enharmonic) pc-motive. As to the example from Beethoven’s Op. 81a, he would disallow the chromatic interplay in the cited passage from the exposition as exemplifying *enharmonic* motivic parallelism, for the simple reason that it involves no enharmonicism, but he would accept it as a *chromatic* (pc-)motive.¹¹

Straus also has much to offer regarding the historical development of theories of the pc-motive. Despite his rather narrowly focused point of view – that of disability – what he gives us is in fact a superb survey of what we might call “the pc-motive *idea*,” liberally sprinkled with illuminating quotations from the theorists (Schenker, Schoenberg, and Tovey) themselves. Most valuable for us here is his discussion of Schoenberg’s theoretical approach to cross-referential chromaticism. Crucial for Straus is Schoenberg’s almost obsessive concern with the notion of the posing and resolving of tonal “problems”: of introducing a tonal conflict into a state of rest, and then working out that conflict compositionally; or of showing that a motive introduced early in a piece has musical *consequences*, which it is then the task of the whole piece to work out:

Every succession of tones produces unrest, conflict, problems. [...] Every musical form can be considered as an attempt to treat this unrest either by halting or limiting it, or by

solving the problem. (Schoenberg 1967: 102, cited in Straus 2006: 140)

[T]he tonic, once placed in question, must wander through all regions and prevail over every single one after having allowed each to display its full power. And only after conquering and neutralizing all opponents – at the end, in other words – can the power of the tonic prove itself and a *state of rest* again prevail. (Schoenberg 1995: 105, 107, cited in Straus 2006: 139)

The *furtherance of the musical idea* [...] may ensue only if the *unrest – problem* – present in the *grundgestalt* or in the *motive* (and formulated by the *theme* or not, if none has been stated) is shown in all its *consequences*. These consequences are presented through the *destinies* of the motive or the *grundgestalt*. Just how the *grundgestalt* is altered under the influence of the *forces struggling* within it, how this *motion* to which the unrest leads, how the forces again attain a state of *rest* – this is the *realization of the idea*, this is its *presentation*. (Schoenberg 1995: 227, cited in Straus 2006: 139–40)

Straus views these statements, and many more like them, in terms of the early nineteenth-century understanding of human disabilities, and he adduces three ways in which the language we use to describe the workings of pc-motives recalls the language evolved to deal with disabilities in the early nineteenth century – that is, at the very time that classic “pc-motive” works were being composed. First, he identifies this precise historical period as that of the development in Western culture of the concepts of normal and abnormal, the tendency to classify individuals as able or disabled, and the notion that the condition of the disabled might be either ameliorated or accommodated (hence the contemporaneous development of schools for the deaf and the blind). Second, he suggests that the composers of such pieces, who for him are essentially Beethoven

¹⁰ Laitz 1992: 69–73 gives further examples in which Schenker, in *Free Composition*, points out similar chromatic/enharmonic pc-motives, in other works of Beethoven (Piano Sonata, Op. 57, first movement) and Chopin (Ballade in A₁ Major, Op. 47).

¹¹ At the beginning of § 256 he insists that examples using mixture and chromatic passing tones do not qualify as exemplifying enharmonic motivic parallelisms. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of this essay for clarifying this and other points with respect to Schenker’s work.

and Schubert, work through their *own* disabilities by means of such works. And third, he observes that the critical reception of such pieces often turns on metaphors of disability – imbalance, unrest, blockage, paralysis, and the like – the very language of Schenker and Schoenberg noted above. He focuses specifically on three *loci classici*: the opening movement of the *Eroica* Symphony with its C \sharp ; the Finale of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony, with its rather different C \sharp (comic, in his view, rather than heroic and tragic); and Schubert's B \flat Piano Sonata, D. 960, and its G \flat /F \sharp – a pc, the implications of which are worked out not just in the first movement, but in the whole multi-movement work. For each he provides a detailed and useful overview of the extensive critical and analytical literature that has developed around them – relatively current work (since c. 1980), the work of Schenker and Schoenberg (and also Tovey), and in some cases even important sources from the early nineteenth century (Straus 2006: 152–75).

And what about Tovey? He was more critic than theorist, and he explicitly addressed his writings to the educated general public, not to the professional musician or musical academic. Indeed, his musical insights, valuable as they are, are theoretically ungrounded and remarkably *ad hoc*. Although he generally inveighed against much that is dear to music analysts – searching for subtle motivic relations, and explaining long-range key relations in tonal pieces – he was unable to resist Beethoven's two famous C \sharp 's – the one in the Third Symphony, and the other in the Eighth. Couching his observations about them in his stylish English prose, he referred to the C \sharp in the *Eroica* as a "cloud," and to the C \sharp in the Eighth Symphony Finale as a "stumbling block" (Tovey 1935).¹² Even if these two quasi-theoretical observations are uncharacteristic for Tovey (they are unique in his work, to the best of my knowledge), the book in which he makes them – the volume on symphonies in *Essays in Musical Analysis* – had wide circulation in the

Anglophone musical world. It was surely the best-known English-language study of the Beethoven symphonies in the mid-twentieth century, and as such it had an enormous influence on a number of American musical scholars, notably Joseph Kerman, Charles Rosen, and Edward T. Cone. All three share with Tovey a fluent literary style, and a knack for making generalizations about pieces and styles that turn out to be intuitively right and musically useful, even though they do not ground their insights explicitly in any theory. When we read Kerman's extensive analysis of the role of G \flat /F \sharp across all four movements of Beethoven's F-Minor Quartet, Op. 95; or Rosen's massive discussion of B \flat 's, G \flat 's, and F \sharp 's in the *Hammerklavier* Sonata; or Cone's interpretation of the E \flat /F \flat in Schubert's last *Moment musical*, we can say with some confidence that Tovey was for them a likely model.¹³

That these scholars were so influenced by Tovey suggests three broad, central points that must be kept in mind through the remainder of this essay. First, musical scholars of the two or so generations after Schenker, Schoenberg, and Tovey – up to our own generation – are indebted important ways to these early twentieth-century figures for articulating the phenomenon that we now call the pc-motive. Yet we later scholars are often not aware of our indebtedness, and thus we often write as though the way pc-motives operate in tonal music is common knowledge – knowledge that everyone has, that has no identifiable origin, and that requires no theoretical grounding.

Second, and equally importantly, for each of the three foundational theorists there is a lineage that connects the progenitor through a middle generation or generations to a current generation, and these lineages are exceptionally clear. The Tovey lineage moves through Kerman, Rosen, and Cone to modern scholars such as Richard Taruskin and Scott Burnham. The Schoenberg lineage moves most obviously through Milton Babbitt and Patricia Carpenter, but also through Rosen (some of whose analyses in *The Classical Style* are deeply Schoenbergian) to Ethan Haimo and

¹² With respect to the C \sharp in m. 7 of the *Eroica* he comments, "then, as the violins enter with a palpitating high note, the harmony becomes clouded, soon however to resolve in sunshine. Whatever you may enjoy or miss in the *Eroica* Symphony, remember this cloud" (p. 45). See p. 66, for his comment about the C \sharp in the Finale of the Eighth Symphony.

¹³ Tovey influenced these scholars in ways far beyond our concerns here. For the particular references, see Kerman 1967: 168–87; Rosen 1971: 407–34, and Cone 1982. A valuable characterization of, and tribute to, Tovey and his work is Kerman 1977: 172–91.

Severine Neff. The Schenkerian line connects most directly through two intermediate generations – first Ernst Oster and Oswald Jonas, then Carl Schachter and Edward Laufer – to currently active Schenkerians such as Poundie Burstein and Mark Anson-Cartwright.¹⁴

And third, paradoxically, even though these lines of influence are clear enough to see, once we recognize them, it turns out that the first-generation theorists themselves actually published few, if any, analyses that we would recognize as pc-motivic analyses. So far as I know, Tovey's only analyses in this vein were those of the two Beethoven symphonic movements noted above; Schoenberg actually published no analyses that would qualify, even though he invented the language that is closest to our now-conventional language of describing pc-motives; and whereas we have found a number of excellent examples in Schenker's later work, the topic is not at the center of his mature theory. What the first-generation writers provided was not bodies of analyses, but rather focused and suggestive ideas, plus *ad hoc* musical observations here and there, that later writers could develop and expand. If we want to find pc-motivic analyses in quantity, we should look not to the progenitor generation, but to the middle and later generations for each tradition, starting in the 1960's and 1970's, and proceeding to the present. It is thus, in a sense, we (and our immediate predecessors), not Tovey and Schoenberg and Schenker, who invented the modern concept of the pc-motive, but we couldn't have done it without them.

III. Critical Observations: Three Examples

In a perfect music-theoretical world, we would be able to find a tonal piece for which there were published analyses by Schenker, Schoenberg, and Tovey, and compare and contrast the three analyses. But living, as we do, in a different music-theoretical world, the best we can do is to find a few representative analyses by the authors in question, and use them as benchmarks against which we can compare hypothetical analyses by the other theorists. We will take a

look at three such examples: a paragraph from Kerman's analysis of Beethoven's Op. 95 String Quartet, which exemplifies a Toveyan (and also Schoenbergian) approach; Schenker's analysis, in *Free Composition*, of Chopin's Mazurka in A \flat Major, Op. 17, No. 3, which sets into relief the difference between his and a Schoenbergian approach; and Schenker's analysis, in the third volume of *The Masterwork in Music*, of the first movement of the *Eroica* Symphony.

Many Anglophone musicians and musical scholars entering the field in the 1960's and 1970's may well have first encountered the notion of a chromatic pitch becoming thematic and compositionally problematized in Kerman's book *The Beethoven Quartets* (Kerman 1967). Interestingly, his first foray into the territory of what we call the pc-motive involved not a chromatic pitch, but a diatonic one: the G (\hat{A} in F major) in the first movement of the Quartet in F Major, Op. 59, No. 1. As he proceeds in his analysis, he shows that this G is juxtaposed to, as well as linked to, G \flat , and he carefully tracks the adventures of both as he proceeds through the movement (Kerman 1967: 94–103). When he comes to the Quartet in F Minor, Op. 95, he raises the stakes by showing – in considerable detail, and quite persuasively – how the note G \flat /F \sharp is central to the tonal argument of the whole four-movement work. A brief quotation captures the sense of his analysis:

In the F-Minor Quartet, individual notes and individual note-relationship are forced into the consciousness more strongly, perhaps, than in any previous composition by Beethoven. This is partly a consequence of the extreme sense of compression. We have seen Beethoven working to convince us of the significance of certain notes – with G and G \flat , for instance – and we have admired the massive draughtsmanship by which such points were made. Here the same sort of thing is accomplished in a single stroke, with a violence unknown to earlier music. There is an urgency to every “sore” note that sticks out of the fabric, and with this new responsibility, a new opportunity for expressive manipulation. (Kerman 1967: 170–71)

¹⁴ See, for example, in the Schenkerian tradition, Carl Schachter's analysis of Schubert's *Nacht und Träume* in Schachter 1983; Schachter 1999; Kamien 2000; Burstein 1998; Anson-Cartwright 2000.

A better example of middle-generation, Toveyan writing about the pc-motive would be hard to find. The prose style, the intended audience (the educated listener rather than the professional musician or scholar), the focus on what happens to a single pc – all are characteristic of Tovey. It is also worth emphasizing that Kerman traces the $G_b/F\sharp$ pc-motive across all four movements of the quartet. His so doing registers the importance of cross-movement tonal relations in canonical works beginning with middle-period Beethoven. Rosen, in *The Classical Style* (Rosen 1971), goes even further in this vein than Kerman. Dealing with pc-motives in this manner, interestingly, resonates easily with Schoenbergian thought (although we have no definitive analyses of this sort from Schoenberg himself), but not so easily with Schenkerian thought. The more Schenker developed his theories, the more he limited his analytical observations to single movements. Since what mattered increasingly for him was the imaginative harmonic, contrapuntal, and motivic enlivening of the triad through a single *Ursatz*, the relationships that he concerns himself with are, at least in his later work, almost exclusively intra-movement, not inter-movement. The later Schenker published no thoroughgoing analyses of any of Beethoven's middle and late quartets, but we can speculate that what such analyses would have looked like: richly detailed voice-leading graphs, probably insightful in all sorts of ways, but blind to the kinds of inter-movement relations that interest Kerman and Rosen.

A work that clearly illustrates the difference between a Schoenbergian and a Schenkerian approach is Chopin's Mazurka in A_b Major, Op. 17, No. 3 (Example 1) – of which we have a published analysis by Schenker, but none by Schoenberg. Yet it is easy enough to imagine what a Schoenbergian analysis of the Mazurka would look like. It would be difficult to find a small piece with a clearer pc-motive, or with a clearer "tonal problem" to be resolved. Each section of the compound ternary ($ABA = aba - cdc - aba$) form makes an issue of the same chromatic pc – $F_b/E\sharp$. The Mazurka would be a lovely and effective example of the phenomenon in an undergraduate analysis course, even if the students had no knowledge whatsoever of Schoenberg's and Schenker's approaches to such matters, so *marked* is the chromatic issue at stake.

Schoenberg first. Consider mm. 1–16 in the light of Straus's description (see above) of the prototypical, pc-motive work: "Early on, usually within the first sixteen measures, a chromatic note is stated in a rhetorically charged manner that marks it for attention." What could be more rhetorically charged, in a work on such a small scale, than this F_b ? – it is sounded in the tenor register, with a dynamic accent, on the downbeat of 10 of the first 16 measures. The tenor voice is not the melody, though, for it is too repetitive, and too lacking in interesting contour; the pianist will rightly emphasize the right-hand – clearly the site of the melodic action. But the pianist can't ignore the chromatic note, either; it's clear that Chopin wants it to be constantly in the listener's ear. The F_b is one of Kerman's "sore notes" – that is, it is a pc-motive stated repetitively, and with rhetorical force.

The *b* section of the first part of the ternary form moves up a step tonally, from the tonic A_b to the upper neighbor " B_b minor" – the scare quotes signifying that this eight-measure section is not really "in" B_b minor, but only "on" it, because there is no harmonic progression in the key. The F_b is now spelled as $E\sharp - \hat{\sharp}4$ in B_b minor – and it continues to be foregrounded as a sore note, now perhaps even more than in the previous section, given the higher level of dissonance: four of the eight downbeats have the $B\sharp/E\sharp$ augmented fourth. Laitz would insist that the pc-motive here is not just $E\sharp$, but rather $f^2 - e\sharp^2 - e_b^2 - d_b^2$, or at least $e\sharp^2 - e_b^2$, echoing exactly the motive of the opening *a* section. Note that the tenor F_b returns in m. 23, to make a smooth reconnection to the return of *a*.

In Schoenbergian terms, the *B* section realizes the "consequences" of the initial F_b : enharmonically respelled as E , it becomes the tonic of the entire section, the *c-d-c* formal structure of which is cast harmonically as $I-V-I$ in E major. The *c* section changes the function of the F_b/E from that of constantly reiterated irritation to that of stable and consonant tonic. Then in *d*, the E returns as an almost continuous dissonant presence – though now a diatonic dissonance in the key, rather than a chromatic one – again in the tenor register, as in *a*. Even more than in the earlier section, it is always there; and, as in *a*, it always resolves downward by semitone to the consonant $E_b/D\sharp$. Finally, the pitch-class (and also the pitch) is

Example 1. Chopin, Mazurka in A \flat Major, Op. 17, No. 3.

Mazurka

F. Chopin. Op. 17, No.3

Legato assai ($\text{♩} = 144$)

p
dolce

mf

legato
riten.
stretto
a tempo

p

Re * *Re*

* *Re* * *Re* * *Re* * *Re* *

1 2

Fine

p *cresc.*

Rea * Rea *

dim. *smorz.* *p* *cresc.*

Rea Rea Rea * Rea * Rea * Rea *

Rea Rea * Rea *

cresc.

Rea *

dim. *p*

Rea * Rea Rea Rea * Rea * Rea *

1 2

Rea * Rea Rea * Rea * Rea *

Dal segno *al Fine*

used, at the very end of the *B* section, to effect the harmonic return to *A* and the original key, making it explicit, by being held as the only sounding note, with a fermata, at m. 80. All in all, the Mazurka thus stands as a textbook case of Schoenberg’s idea of a tonal problem that in one sense plays out, in the most obvious possible way, the consequences of a single chromatic issue.

Proceeding to Schenker, it is our good fortune that he provides a spatially aligned deep-middleground and foreground graph of the entire Mazurka in *Free Composition* (Schenker 1979, § 102, Figure 30a; Example 2). His reading of the piece interprets precisely the same musical content that the Schoenbergian reading did, but what it highlights as significant is utterly different. Rather than registering and evaluating these differences immediately, let us simply enter Schenker’s world for a moment and absorb his view of the Mazurka, saving comparisons for later. Moving from the background to the foreground, as he always did in his analyses from the mid-1920’s on, we see that his *Kopfton* is $\hat{3}$, as it must be, given the prominence of this scale degree in the leading voice, and the absence of a descent from $\hat{5}$ in the *A* sections. The reason that he places this particular analysis, of this particular piece, in the particular part of the book that he does, is that it is a clear example of his concept of mixture – especially mixture on a large scale, such that it is form-determining for a work. His point is that the mixture of the third scale degree – the lowering of the C of the global tonic of A_b major, to C_b – generates the contrasting *B* section, with its turning of E into a temporary tonic – of the larger ternary form. Within this larger form, and shifting down to his foreground analysis, we

can see that within the individual *A* and *B* sections, in contrast, a diatonic upper neighbor generates the ternary form: $c^2-d_b^2-c^2$ ($\hat{3}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}$ in A_b major) in *A*, $b^1-c\sharp^1-b^1$ ($\hat{5}-\hat{6}-\hat{5}$ in E major) in *B*. Schenker takes care to point out (in his § 103, just after his discussion of the example in the text volume of *Free Composition*) that “[t]he mixed third does not represent a linear progression or a neighboring note.” That is to say, there is no contrapuntal motion here, but just a momentary switching of the mode, so as to bring about a fall into the key of the lowered sixth.

From our point of view, what is extraordinary and striking about Schenker’s reading is that it does not take into account at all the role of the F_b in the *A* section, or the relation of the F_b to the E of the *B* section. It is here that the Schenkerian hearing is dramatically different from the Schoenbergian one. We are reminded of Ruth Solie’s observation about how Schenkerian thought gives us a conceptual, top-down perspective, based on interlocking structural levels, whereas Schoenbergian thought gives us a perceptual, left-to-right perspective, based on association (Solie 1980: 153). A Schoenbergian reading – or, if one is teaching the piece, a Schoenbergian pedagogy – would observe the rhetorical emphasis on the F_b from the very beginning, and would then be able to trace, step by step, how the piece is in important respects “about” what happens to this note as a pc-motive. This is a story that is neither difficult to see and hear, nor difficult to tell. It resides on the surface of the piece, and it perfectly follows the general plot structure of works with pc-motives, as described by Laitz, Straus, and Schoenberg (and also Kerman, Rosen, Cone, and many others).

Example 2. Chopin, Mazurka in A_b Major, Op. 17, No. 3: analysis from Schenker 1979, Fig. 30.

Chopin, Mazurka op. 17 no. 3

Mgd. I - 16, 17- (n.n.) 24, 25- 40, 41- 56, 57- (n.n.) 64, 65- 80 - I b^{\sharp} V I

Fgd. I - b^{\flat} - (n.n.hrm.) - I I - $b^{\flat}VI^{\flat}V-I$ (=E major: I- (V I)- II \sharp^{\flat} - V-I) - I
 { A_1- (a_1- $b-$ a_2) - $B-$ (a_1- $b-$ a_2) - A_2

It is thus tempting to malign Schenker for ignoring what we might consider the most obvious and salient feature of the Mazurka – for focusing our attention on melodic scale degree $\hat{3}$, when there seems to be so much going on about scale degree $\hat{5}$. Such criticism hits the mark, to be sure, but there are also good reasons for withholding judgment on this score – reasons having to do with what Schenker claims or does not claim for his analytical sketches in *Free Composition*. Even if his analysis is silent about an important aspect of the music, we should remember that he invokes the Mazurka, and includes his analysis thereof, only as an instance of modal mixture; he makes no larger claims for the analysis. Indeed, virtually everything he has to “say” about the Mazurka, he “says” in the sketch; he offers literally no commentary on this particular example (a sentence in § 102, and a comment in § 103 that highlights some theoretical issues regarding pieces in which mixture generates form).

Our final example is the first movement of the *Eroica* Symphony, the longest work of which the later, mature Schenker published a thoroughgoing analysis (Schenker 1997).¹⁵ In the third volume of *The Masterwork in Music* (1930) – which, of course, includes separate analyses of the other three movements of the symphony – he takes on this central musical text. In the first section of his analysis of the movement, entitled “Description of the Content,” he works through its 691 measures in analytical prose, accompanied by extensive sketches of the deep middleground and of the foreground, each foreground sketch stretching out to two or more feet. Most of his massive analysis does not concern us here. But what does concern us is the famous $C\sharp$ in m. 7, and its working out later in the movement. We ask, naturally, “What does Schenker do with the famous $C\sharp$?” Does his analytical treatment of it justify a claim that he interprets it as what we would call a pc-motive?

Before venturing an answer to this question, a word of historical context is in order. The *Eroica* is,

of course, one of the most written-about works in the Western musical canon, and the $C\sharp$ in m. 7 is arguably its single most written-about note (as Richard Taruskin, for example, claims in his discussion of the symphony in Taruskin 2005, vol. 2: 655–70).¹⁶ By the 1920’s, a vast literature had accumulated about the symphony, and especially about its first movement. A recent dissertation by Vasili Byros exhaustively accounts for what was published in the nineteenth century about the $C\sharp$ (and there was a lot), at least in the immediate musical context of its surrounding measures. But Byros’s interest is only in the opening eleven measures, and especially with regard to the degree to which writers did or did not hear a move to G minor in mm. 7–8; he does not pursue the question of its reappearances later in the movement (Byros 2009: 4–6, 18–28, 38–44, and 53–67).¹⁷ Accordingly, he does not address the issue of $C\sharp$ as a pc-motive, since it is not the single occurrence of the pc, but rather its recurrences and cross-referentiality that make it such a motive at all. And so, we cannot say, without much further research, whether Schenker, in writing his analysis, had precedents that treated the note music-analytically as a “pc-motive,” or if he only had precedents that dealt with it as a marked chromatic event at the beginning of the movement.

In any case, when he published his analysis in 1930, he stepped into a vast and ongoing critical and analytical tradition. Characteristically, he did not step lightly, entitling the essay “Beethoven’s Third Symphony: Its True Content Described for the First Time.” *True* content, *first* time... what does he mean? He tells us explicitly in the first two sentences of his literature review:

Most of what has been written about the Third Symphony in theoretical, biographical, and analytical works is not in fact music literature: it has nothing to do with music, let alone with Beethoven’s Third Symphony. I can safely leave it to the reader to convince himself of this fact. (Schenker 1997: 67)¹⁸

¹⁵ In the essay, Schenker never calls the symphony the *Eroica*, referring to it only as the Third Symphony. His monograph on the longer Ninth Symphony was published in 1912, long before he developed the theories of structural levels, the *Urfinie* and *Ursatz*, and hidden motivic repetition.

¹⁶ For a useful introduction to the reception history of the *Eroica*, see Sipe 1998, Chapter 4. See also Sipe 1992.

¹⁷ Byros is especially interested in the $C\sharp$, and the contemporary cultural hearing of it, as a site of historical, or situated, music cognition. See also Hyer 1996.

¹⁸ Schenker does make two exceptions to his blanket dismissal: August Halm 1928–29 and Gustav Nottebohm 1880.

With these two sentences Schenker wipes the slate clean. But his so doing is actually quite *uncharacteristic* of him. As Ian Bent has noted, beginning as far back as his monograph and edition of the Bach *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* of 1909, Schenker established a consistent and standard order of topics in his books or essays on individual works. The pattern, with occasional variations, obtained from 1909 through the three volumes of *The Masterwork in Music* in 1925–30. By this time the pattern, or “matrix,” as Bent calls it, had solidified to the following: “musical content (subdivided) – primary source materials – subsequent editorial activity – performance – secondary literature” (Bent 1986: 146–47). Given the care with which he had regularly reviewed the existing literature in all his earlier work, it is surprising that he would simply dismiss it outright in the *Eroica* essay, particularly since there was so much of it: hundreds of pages about the movement had been published by 1930. Whatever his reasons – much of the literature really was perhaps hardly worth engaging at all, and his analysis does indeed open up an entirely new *Eroica* world – what this means is that we have no explicit statement from him regarding previous readings of the C \sharp , and not a word about the interpretations – analytical, critical, and hermeneutical – that had grown up around it.

Before looking briefly at Schenker’s analysis, we can easily construct a pc-motivic account, à la Schoenberg or Tovey, or Kerman or Rosen, of how the famous C \sharp of m. 7 ramifies through the movement. We can take as a model any analysis that identifies the initial C \sharp as rhetorically marked, and then shows that this pc has “consequences”: it reappears later, it is expanded or developed, it generates new tonal areas, and so forth. The following paragraph offers just such an analysis, based entirely on analytical observations that have been made in print, some of them many times, some only relatively recently, and some going back into the nineteenth century.

We begin, of course, by noting the startling effect of the C \sharp in m. 7: its dissonance, the

oddity of its being spelled C \sharp rather than D \flat , the uncertainty that it introduces into the movement, and in general the rhetorical marking that calls our attention to it in the first place. We then must identify passages in which the chromatic pc is developed cross-referentially over the course of the remainder of the movement. There are five such passages, noted here in the order of the strength of their connection to the passage in m. 7, and thus also, as it happens, in the frequency with which they have been pointed out in the analytical literature. First is the beginning of the recapitulation (mm. 394–411), in which the C \sharp reappears, exactly as it was in the exposition, but now enharmonically reinterpreted to resolve down to C \flat , which in turn functions as the dominant of F major. Second is the passage immediately following these initial recapitulatory measures (mm. 416–22); these measures make a tonic of D \flat , the enharmonic equivalent of C \sharp , and highlight it with the sounding of the principal motive of the movement in the flute. (Numerous writers point out the first of these passages, but not the second.) Third is the beginning of the coda, which opens with successive statements of the principal motive, first on the tonic E \flat major (mm. 551–54), then suddenly down a whole step to D \flat major (mm. 557–60), and immediately thereafter to C major (mm. 561–68). Analysts cite this descending passage as recalling, reinterpreting, and expanding in a new way the C \sharp of m. 7. Fourth is the rising sequence by semitone early in the development (mm. 178–89), in which the principal motive is stated successively in C minor, C \sharp minor, and D minor. The connection to the initial C \sharp is less clear here, since the direction is ascending and the mode of the C \sharp triad minor. A few analysts also relate this ascending passage by semitone to the descending one by whole tone at the beginning of the coda. Finally, some analysts hear the diminished seventh chord in mm. 663–64, with the D \flat in the bass of m. 664, as a final, dramatic reminder of the C \sharp .¹⁹

And how much of this do we get from Schenker? Virtually nothing. Anyone looking to Schenker for

¹⁹ A truly obsessive pc-motive analyst would also note the passing D \flat s in the cello, mm. 673 and 677 – the last D \flat s, and the last chromatic pcs of any description, in the movement. But I have not encountered this point in the literature. – To detail exactly what sources make each analytical point in this paragraph would require a footnote far longer than is practicable here. Suffice it to say that the following published sources, listed in chronological order of publication, note one or more of the five analytical points about the cross-referential C \sharp listed in the text: Rochlitz (?) 1807 (partial excerpt and translation in Sipe 1998: 57); Earp 1993; Lockwood 1982; Burnham 1995; Kinderman 1995; Brinkmann 2000; and Taruskin 2005, vol. 2: 659–67.

a pc-motivic analysis of one of the most famous pc-motivic movements in the tonal repertoire is certain to be disappointed. Schenker simply does not deal with $C\sharp/D\flat$, *qua* $C\sharp/D\flat$, as a pitch-class, at m. 7; nor does he mark that $C\sharp$ so as to find its motivic and harmonic reappearances, as a pitch-class, later in the movement. Of the five cross-referential points listed above, he calls attention only to the first – the enharmonic resolution of the $C\sharp/D\flat$ down to $C\flat$ at the beginning of the recapitulation. And here his writing is utterly matter-of-fact, completely empty of rhetorical flourish or dramatic force. He simply refers us back to an earlier figure in which: 1) he shows that the $C\sharp$ of m. 7 would more normally be spelled as $D\flat$, and resolve as a passing note down from $E\flat$ to C in a V_2 to IV^6 progression; and 2) he shows the same $E\flat-D\flat-C$ motion, but C becomes the bass of a V/ii , as it does in the recapitulation of the opening theme. His only comment with respect to this new continuation at the beginning of the recapitulation is: “The descending step $C\sharp-C\flat$ in [mm.] 402–4 has already been considered in connection with Figure 5.” (Schenker 1997, Figures 5a and 5b, 11) He thus downplays the new harmonization, as if to say: “This we already know, so we move on.”

Compare Tovey’s description of the same passage. Harkening back to his depiction of the $C\sharp$ in m. 7 as a “cloud,” with the admonition “Remember that cloud: it leads eventually to one of the most astonishing and subtle dramatic strokes in all music,” he notes, at the beginning of the recapitulation. “Soon the theme reaches the little cloud that we noticed in the beginning. The cloud ‘resolves’ in a new direction, and the sun comes out [...]” (Tovey 1935: 45–46)²⁰ In purely musical terms, Schenker and Tovey understand the passage in the same way; it repeats the opening measures, up to the measure with the $C\sharp$, then it makes an enharmonic shift that sends it in a new direction. But they differ wildly – at least that is what their prose leads us to believe – regarding the import of this detail. Since the essence of the pc-motive is drama, and the drama in question comes to the fore each time the pitch reappears and is reinterpreted, Schenker’s analysis is as far from a

pc-motivic analysis as is imaginable. Similarly, in the other pc-associative passages in question (the semitonal sequence early in the development, the tonicization of $D\flat$ in the recapitulation, the whole-tone sequence beginning the coda, and the diminished seventh with bass $D\flat$ in the coda) he does not respond at all to the referential aspects of the $C\sharp/D\flat$, and does not in any way point out this pc as significant in itself. Of the sort of dramatic prose we have become accustomed to in pc-motivic analyses, there is not a whiff.

To compare Schenker’s analysis to Tovey’s, or to an hypothetical Schoenbergian analysis, or to the various analyses noted in footnote 19 above, is by no means to claim that he *should* have made the same points, or that these points are necessarily more valuable or perceptive than his, or that he was in any sense ignorant or insensitive in not making them. The comparison simply shows, quite dramatically, that Schenker was not interested, in his analysis of the first movement of the *Eroica*, in the cross-referential chromaticism that has so engaged many other writers, and that is our concern here. As it turns out, and as is so often the case with the late Schenker, what we *do* get – though it is unexpected, and even a bit odd – turns out to be striking, insightful, and eminently worth noting. But to pursue what he really does have to say would take us into another topic, and another essay, entirely.

IV. Critical Perspective

In writing about the thematization of chromatic pcs in tonal music, one treads on dangerous ground. It is not a topic on which it is easy to find something new to say, and it has a strong “already-known, too-much-written-about” quality to it. Some readers of this essay may feel that it unnecessarily resurrects a topic popular in the 1980’s and early 1990’s – but a topic that would be better served by leaving it in the grave. There are valid reasons for such a position. This sort of analytical work is, as a friend reminds me, “an easy

²⁰ Interestingly, the pc cross-reference here (mm. 402–4) noted by Schenker and Tovey was already pointed out by Rochlitz in 1807: “Beethoven likewise hits upon the diminished seventh chord on $C\sharp$, but does not resolve it, instead moving downward to C, and unexpectedly yet simply and naturally moves to the key of F through the dominant seventh” (Sipe 1998: 57).

game to play.” That is, all it takes to play the game is being able to recognize which pcs in a given key are chromatic, paying attention to whether any of these reappear with some frequency, and then constructing a narrative about them if they do. In the 1980’s it was too easy to latch onto a marked pitch – a $\flat\hat{6}$ or $\sharp\hat{4}$ or $\flat\hat{7}$ in major, or a $\flat\hat{2}$ in minor – pursue it doggedly throughout a piece, ignoring melodic motives, surface rhythm, linear-contrapuntal structure, hypermeter, and form, skipping altogether the sections that do nothing with the thematized note, and ultimately showing how the chosen pitch-class is recuperated at the end. Not necessarily a sophisticated task, and not

one to inspire confidence if it is not nuanced with an understanding of other musical variables.

But pc-motivic analysis is intriguing because it reaches across divides – analysis and criticism, musicology and music theory, educated reader and sophisticated musician – that many other methods do not. Equally intriguing, and in fact the stimulus that led to this essay, is the fact that it seems to pop up everywhere, but little has been done to address the question of why it occurs and finds favor in so many traditions of writing about tonal music. It is to be hoped that the present essay is a salutary beginning in the effort to answer that question.

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Heliklassimotiiv tonaalse muusika analüüsis: mõningaid ajaloolisi ja kriitilisi tähelepanekuid

Patrick McCreless

(tõlkinud Mart Humal)

Heliklassimotiivi mõistet on kasutatud tähistamaks sellist motiivi tonaalses muusikas, mis sisaldab erilisi, enamasti enharmoniliselt ümbermõtestatavaid kromaatilisi astmeid, nagu $b\hat{6}/\#5$, $\#4$ ja $b\hat{7}$ mažooris või $b\hat{2}$ minooris. Ameerika muusikateoreetik Steven Laitz on oma vätekirjas (1992) osutanud heliklassimotiivi idee (kuigi mitte mõiste enda) ennetamisele Schenkeri, Schönbergi ja Rudolf Réti teoreetilistes töödes ja kasutanud seda Schuberti laulude analüüsimisel. Käesolev artikkel tugineb Laitzi tööle, näidates, et paljud tonaalse muusika uurijad – nii muusikateoreetikud kui ka muusikaajaloolased – on kasutanud viimastel aastatel heliklassimotiivi mõistet, kusjuures selle tänapäevase kasutusviisi lähtekohaks on lisaks Schenkeri ja Schönbergi töödele mitte Réti, vaid Donald Francis Tovey omad.

Nagu on märkinud juba Laitz, on heliklassimotiivi kasutatud esmakordselt 18. sajandi lõpul ja 19. sajandi algul – mõningates Haydni ja Mozarti teostes, kuid samuti Beethoveni varase ja eriti keskmise perioodi teostes. Käesolevas artiklis on püütud detailselt jälgida eelmainitud kolme teoreetiku mõju tänapäeva uurijatele: Tovey traditsiooni jätkamist Joseph Kermani, Charles Roseni ja Edward T. Cone'i kaudu Richard Taruskini ja Scott Burnhami poolt, Schenkeri traditsiooni jätkamist Carl Schachteri ja Edward Lauferi kaudu Poundie Bursteini ja Mark Anson-Cartwrighti poolt ning Schönbergi traditsiooni jätkamist Milton Babbitti ja Patricia Carpenteri kaudu Ethan Haimo ja Severine Neffi poolt.

Lõpuks on vaadeldud kolme trükis ilmunud analüüsi (neist üks Joseph Kermani ja kaks Schenkeri sulest), võrdlemaks (koos hüpoteetilise Schönbergi analüüsiga) Schenkeri, Schönbergi ja Tovey tõlgendusi. Katkend Kermani Beethoveni keelpillikvarteti *op.* 95 analüüsist (Kerman 1967) esindab Toveyle tüüpilist lähenemisviisi. Kerman nimetab osa algul kõlavat heli *ges* „valuliseks noodiks“ (*sore note*), mis omandab (koos oma enharmonilise teisendiga *fis*) tervet neljaosalist teost läbiva motiivi tähenduse. Kermani arvates moodustub kogu kvarteti dramaatiline narratiiv just selle heliga seotud sündmustest. Kahjuks ei leidu Schönbergil eelmainituga võrreldavat analüüsi kromaatilise heliklassi harmooniliste teisenduste kasutamise kohta kompositsioonilistel eesmärkidel. Kuid oma teoreetilistes töödes on ta Toveyle ja Kermanile lähedastel seisukohtadel: Kermani „valulise noodi“ asemel räägib ta sageli (formaalsemas, muusikateoreetilises kõnepruugis) „kompositsioonilisest probleemist“, mille lahendamine on terve teose eesmärgiks. Schönbergi tõlgendusviisi võiks illustreerida Chopini masurka *As*-duur (*op.* 17/3) näitel. Kohe teose algul ja kogu selle kolmeosalise liitvormi vältel on retooriliselt rõhutatud heli *fes/e*, *As*-duuri $b\hat{6}$, terve *B*-osa aluseks aga on tonikaliseerunud *e*. Kuigi seda teost ei ole analüüsinud ei Schönberg ega temale sarnase lähenemisviisiga Tovey ega Kerman, võib ette kujutada, milline see oleks võinud neil olla. Õnneks leidub selle teose analüüs Schenkeril (Schenker 1979), kelle tõlgendus näitab kujukalt kromaatika käsitlemise erinevust tema ning teisalt Schönbergi, Tovey ja Kermani poolt. Schenker isegi ei maini retooriliselt rõhutatud heli *fes/e*, vaid keskendub teose häältejuhtimisstruktuurile, kus domineerivad *Kopfton* (peaheli) *c* (mitte $\hat{5}$, vaid $\hat{3}$) ja selle väljaarendus terve teose vältel. Schenkeri arvates ei tulene *E*-duuri kasutamine pala keskmises osas mitte selle toonika enharmonilisest samasusest heliga *fes* (*As*-duuri $b\hat{6}$), vaid kõrge ja madala toonika tertsiiga samanimelisest vahelduvlaadist. Kõnealuse analüüsi järgi otsustades ei huvita Schenkerit palas hoopiski mitte „valuline noot“, vaid *Ursatz*'ist lähtuv häältejuhtimine ning laadivaheldusel rajanev muusikaline vorm.

Veelgi selgemini ilmneb Schenkeri lähenemisviisi antud probleemile Beethoveni „*Eroica*“ esimese osa analüüsist (Schenker 1997). Jällegi oleksid nii Schönbergi kui ka Tovey traditsiooni järgijad ilmselt keskendunud kuulsale helile *cis* taktis 7 ning selle kromaatilise heliklassi osatähtsusele esimese osa harmoonilises arengus. Schenker aga tõlgendab seda heli ainult *Ursatz*'ist tuleneva häältejuhtimise ja harmoonia seisukohalt kui üht 691 takti pikkuse hiigelosa lineaar-harmonilise struktuuri pisidetalli, käsitlemata seda heliklassimotiivina *cis/des*.